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Primary Education

The Child, the Classroom,
and the Curriculum

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in Education and Nelson Educational Services

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NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

This issue of *Orbit* deals with an area of education of particular concern to parents and increasingly to teachers throughout the school system — that is, the teaching of young children in the primary grades (Kindergarten to Grade 3). The Guest Editor is Clare Kosnik, a former primary teacher and school board consultant who is now a doctoral candidate in our Department of History and Philosophy of Education.

The issue looks at teaching a range of subjects to very young children — from reading and writing through to math and science and art and physical education. The authors as a whole support a holistic philosophy of education as they attempt to link the child's needs and developmental level with the formal curriculum. Though this approach is the subject of critical editorials in the popular media, it is often not well understood. In this regard, readers should find particularly enlightening the interviews with internationally renowned child psychologist OISE's Otto Weininger and the late Ada Schermann.

Primary Education continues the *Orbit* tradition of including the voices of classroom teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers. It takes an original, invigorating look at an area of education that deserves careful study.

Arthur Kruger

PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Primary Education

The Child, the Classroom, and the Curriculum

The term "primary education" conjures up many images for me: children chanting a poem; boys and girls painting colourful pictures, then writing stories in big print; a small group laughing as they enjoy a tape at the listening centre; a student building a tall tower of blocks; youngsters speaking aloud as they write their stories using spelling that is natural to them; a young boy measuring the width of the classroom; two girls swiftly and adeptly loading a computer program; children poring over a picture book; and a teacher working with a small group as they dramatize a story.

Although these images are accurate they tell only part of the story. Primary classrooms are active, dynamic, and challenging places *and* underlying all of these activities is the complex matter of how children learn. The bright, cheerful, active classrooms belie the enormous research, thought, analysis, and planning that have gone into making rich learning environments.

Since primary classrooms tend to "look" and "sound" different from junior, intermediate, or senior classrooms, they are surrounded by a certain mystique. On the one hand, many educators recite the well-worn phrase "the primary years are the most important," while others easily dismiss primary as play-time and are unwilling to take students seriously until they are "real" readers and writers. All of the articles in this issue of *Orbit* clearly illustrate the in-depth research that grounds practice, and each author in his or her own way attempts to dispel the myths that surround primary education.

There are many different approaches to learning. From my own experiences as a classroom teacher and as a student of education, I endorse what has become widely known as "child-centred" learning — that is, learning which focuses on children's active participation and the need for a curriculum which is relevant to their lives. In these fundamental ways child-centred learning is distinguished from more teacher-directed approaches which emphasize rote learning and formal

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lessons. Yet in this difficult political, social, and economic climate, the public wants concrete, measureable educational results and as they turn their wary eyes to schools, they note that primary classrooms do not look and sound like "real" classrooms. They look longingly to the "good old days" and advocate a return to the "golden age" of primary education. Granted, we have many areas which must continue to evolve but our focus on children must not be lost.

This issue of *Orbit* is divided into four sections which reflect many aspects of primary schooling. In "The Child and the Primary Classroom" section, I first consider the importance of the class as a learning community. Next, Professor Otto Weininger, child psychologist and a strong advocate for children, discusses child-centred practices. His penetrating analysis of play and the link between theory and practice dispels the myth of the "softness" of current primary programs. Building on Weininger's theory, Professor Margaret Robertson takes us through British Columbia's innovative Primary Program.

The second section, "Curriculum Issues," begins with Professor Arn Bower's discussion of language learning. Since he defines reading and writing as the making of meaning, he argues that rather than trying to fit children into pre-determined stages, teachers must assist each child with his or her own literacy development. School consultant Dr. Brian McCud-den shifts the focus to another of the 3 R's, arithmetic. He identifies five components of a comprehensive mathematics program, all of which should help math become rel-

evant in children's lives. The next two articles by educators Barb Smith and Ann Peron consider the place of physical education and art appreciation in the primary program. Both articles present highly innovative, interactive, and integrated programs. In our changed and changing world, television has claimed a hold on many children. Jack Livesley and Frank Trotz, who have recently written a book on the topic of media and education, dispel some of the myths about television viewing. To complete this section, Professor Theresa Thorkildsen poses some challenging questions about testing practices. By showing the discrepancies between teachers' and children's perceptions of testing, she will stimulate many primary educators to rethink their approaches to testing.

The third section, "Teacher Voices," includes a dialogue between primary educators on the child-centred classroom. School administrator Dr. Sister Valerie Van Carwenberghe charts the changes in primary education and wonders if we have come full circle in our approach. The training of primary educators is addressed by Professor Isabel Doxey who considers various approaches and concludes that pre-service programs must be comprehensive.

Schools are partners with parents; they too must have a voice. The fourth section, "Between Home and School," includes an interview with the late Professor Ada Schermann, distinguished childhood teacher and educator, who argues for a strong link between home and school and offers many practical suggestions on how to build bridges. Founder and Principal of the Mabin School, Gerri Mabin, shares some reminiscences about Ada, her mentor and friend. Our final article is from a parent, Annetta Braine, who reflects on her own children's experiences in primary grades and voices the concerns of many parents.

Primary education is not just curriculum; Jane Roland Martin states that the "basics" should be *care, concern, and connection*, and each of the contributors to this issue of *Orbit* demonstrates these three values.

THE CHILD AND THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

The Class as a Learning Community

Expanding the Education Equation

Clare Madott Kosnik

Guest Editor

When I was a classroom teacher I knew that school was much more than just standard curriculum. Children learned as much from the context of the class or from the activity centres in which they worked as they did from my formal lessons. As I continue to study education, I have reached the conclusion that the class culture is a highly influential factor in the whole schooling process. The sense of belonging in the class, the safe environment, the appreciation of effort, the types of rules, and the opportunity to work collaboratively are some of the "factors" that shape the school experience.

Fortunately, in the course of my career, I have had the opportunity to visit many primary classrooms. As I worked with teachers and children I developed a sixth sense which homed in on the hidden agenda of the class. In some classes, children easily shared crayons and materials, spoke kindly to each other, made room for another student at the centre, waited patiently for the teacher, and knew what to do when finished their work. I referred to this unspoken way of behaving as the "look and feel" of the

class. It slowly occurred to me that the way children acted mirrored the way they were treated. Their behaviour reflected the culture of the class.

Conceiving of the class as a community is almost as difficult as understanding its power. Comments from experienced teachers such as "This group just isn't the same as last year's class," or "This class is so easy," or "I could never do that activity with this class" indicate that the collective group has its own personality and values. A community is a very complex network of relationships, histories, rules, and goals. Since we have been part of communities from birth, we often take their presence and structure for granted. They are so much a part of our living that we do not stop and take much notice of them until they break down.

Since teachers spend ten months with the same group of children, in a fairly confined space, the class does not remain a collection of disparate individuals:

"Life in classrooms is an intense social experience. For six hours a day, week after week, month after month, one teacher and anywhere from twenty-two to thirty-four students (sometimes more) live together in a space the size of a large living room." (Peterson, 1992, p. 1)

The children and teacher come together to be a group; however, the group can be

one that is fractured and competitive or it can be one that is supportive and caring. With my students I strove to have a group that was affectionate, warm, responsible, critical (in the good sense), predictable, and strong. Part of the reason that the group evolved this way was my emphasis on developing a sense of belonging among the students. And this feeling is absolutely essential to developing the class into a healthy, positive community.

Schools are supposed to be in the business of teaching and learning but good teachers know that there is much more to teaching than good lesson plans. The way the group members interact and the way the group sees itself impacts on the learning. In order to have the class and teacher working with a shared purpose and a common vision, the class must become a *community of learners*.

The term "community of learners" is becoming more common in the literature and, like all educational jargon, it can mean many different things. I have developed the following definition: a community of learners is a cohesive group which has a common focus and shared values and encourages the individual to make connections. There is a dual purpose to the community: individual growth and group development. The relationship between the individual and the community is mutually supportive — both are strengthened through the relationship.

The individuals in the community have three different types of responsibilities: first, a caring for the community's smooth functioning and for the group's well-being as a whole; secondly, an obligation towards their own personal education and happiness; and, thirdly, a duty towards the well-being of individual members. Within the community, students learn about life while also increasing their knowledge of more traditional academic subjects; these two goals are

seen as complementing each other. The community is a group of individuals who know, value, share, problem-solve, act, reflect, and choose. It strives to balance both the student's and the group's needs. It is not the individual versus the group; both are important.

Shaping the class into a community of learners is important for two basic reasons. First, most primary school teachers want to relieve children's anxieties about school and they devise many activities and opportunities to help children overcome their fears. A feeling of security is one of the "basics" that schools must provide. When children feel they are part of a supportive, caring group they often have the confidence to move onto more challenging tasks, begin to develop a positive sense of self, and feel a sense of responsibility for the group's smooth functioning. The children's comfort level is a critical factor in determining the attitude they develop towards school. Secondly, the quality and quantity of learning increase when children are actively involved in the learning community. As they engage in discussions, work collaboratively on a project, or participate in organizing a class event, they are clarifying meaning, developing arguments, articulating a position, and readjusting their thinking. Whether it is mathematics, science, spelling, or setting classroom routines, interaction with peers and teachers probes and pushes the learning to a higher order. The learning is supported by the community and the community provides multiple opportunities for learning.

The class as a community of learners does not just happen; it requires the guidance of a skilled, caring teacher. There are two aspects which are critical to its formation: relationships and structures. Of utmost importance is the development of the relationships within the class — between teacher and children and between child and child. The way the teacher responds to questions, handles discussions, talks to the children, treats requests, and deals with discipline problems becomes the model. These interactions shape the relationship; at the heart of it there must be respect and caring.

There is no simple guide to follow on how to develop positive relationships. One method that I use is to recall a teacher who made an impact on me. I try to remember what types of things were said and how this teacher made me feel. Miss

Black, my Grade 2 teacher, had soft eyes which said, "I am ready to listen." Another technique that I use to help build up positive relationships is a sort of "out of body" experience. I listen to what I am saying, how I say it and try to imagine the situation from the children's perspective. In all honesty, there were times when I realized that I sounded like a shrew and I was shocked at the message that I was sending to the children through my tone of voice and body language. In building up a positive rapport, it is important to see the situation from the chil-

$$\left[\left(\text{curriculum} + \text{class as a learning community} \right) \times \text{teacher's role} \right] \times \text{school community} = \text{education}$$

dren's perspective. Further, it is important to be open with them about the importance of the class as a community. The first word that I taught my Grade 1 students was "friend." We help the relationships to grow by talking about friendships, modelling encouraging behaviour, discouraging "tattle tales," praising co-operation (not just the finished product), and providing opportunities for children to interact.

A second essential part of the community is the structures the teacher creates and imposes. Similar to the way that the teacher deals with the children, the structures send a message to the children about the importance of the community. Structures are guidelines, rules, routines, traditions, and processes. Both classroom management techniques and curriculum choices affect the quality of the community. Teachers make choices about the way they run their class. Some strategies teachers can use to build up a sense of community are: student monitors, negotiating class rules, and student choice of activities. Think about the structures in your class: enter and exit routines, use of library passes, access to activity centres, opening exercise routines, birthday traditions, and decoration of bulletin boards. The way each of these structures develops affects the type of community in your class.

The type of curriculum programs the teacher chooses will also impact on the class. For example, in the language arts program when children read their work to a friend and modify the piece, they are developing a learning partnership. Other ways that the program can support the community are: sharing storywriting topics with other children; recommending a good book to a student who cannot find a suitable one; helping a student paint the illustrations for a big book that she wrote; or working together on a project. These joint activities depend on children

knowing how to work together and valuing learning partnerships.

The class as a learning community is not an add-on to an already overloaded timetable. It is an essential part of the schooling process because it increases the children's sense of self and supports the children's learning. When we talk about schooling, we must move beyond focusing on individual curriculum areas to consider the whole experience. When we use this wider perspective, the importance of the class as a learning community becomes evident. The equation for schooling can be expanded and rewritten to include many factors — curriculum, the class as a learning community, the teacher's role, and the school community.

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Understanding Educational Play

An Interview with Otto Weininger

Dr. Otto Weininger is a professor of child psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. For the past 20 years he has worked with teachers to develop educational play programs and for ten years he developed, directed, and ran his own school. He is currently developing a science program with teachers at the Etobicoke and Toronto Boards of Education. The interview was conducted by Una Villiers, Co-ordinator, Early Childhood Education Department, Toronto Board of Education.

Una I'd like to begin by asking you to define what the word play means to you.

Otto Play is essentially a behaviour pattern that all children show and they show it at a very early age. It's a behaviour that is intrinsically motivating. Children are extremely interested in what they do and as they do what they do they find it intensely more interesting. That is, the interest continues as they proceed with the act or the behaviour — for me, the word is "play."

During play, children are able to set up problems for themselves. The problems are the process through which they begin to understand how to solve the problems. It's not so much that they may come to specific solutions, but as they go through the process they arrive at solutions which only lead to more problems which lead to solutions which lead to more problems. So essentially, when children are playing, they are elaborating for themselves the whole business of what a problem is, how you solve a problem, and then once you've solved a problem and reached some kind of conclusion, how you then go about formulating other problems to solve. If we can tap into this process, then we can have the most effective educational system available. I believe it's our job as teachers to extend and to elaborate this original kind of play so that it makes meaningful sense in terms of the curricu-

lum that we're attempting to teach. Otherwise, we deal with teaching in a didactic style. We start off from where we think the child should be and often there's a big gap between where the child is and where we think the child is, and if that gap exists, then we leave a foundational omission — that is, the child doesn't really understand what he or she is dealing with.

Una How would you respond to those individuals who feel that learning by rote is also important?

Otto Yes, they do learn by rote, but then when they reach Grade 3 we have to introduce them to that whole business called abstraction, and if they have not dealt with it, as they do in play, in terms of integration, then they can't show effective capacity to abstract, and so we begin to have many school failures in Grade 3.

One of the programs that we set up for primary children teaches mathematics. In this program, children use building materials, for example, blocks, to build varying kinds of "structures" — that's the term the children gave immediately to this math program, so it's called "structures." As the children build a house, or a fence, or a very interesting tall structure, the teachers act to help them understand the varying kinds of mathematical languages that are involved in the structures

they have created. If the child builds a structure that is round, the teacher talks about the child's circular structure, and then at an appropriate time introduces the idea of the perimeter, the idea of the radius, the idea of the volume. That is, the teacher can help the child to translate a concrete structure into abstract terms which enables the child to proceed on to varying kinds of mathematical manipulations. When the child lays out eight rows of four blocks in each row, the teacher can help the child to point out that the first row contains four blocks, the next row also has four blocks and if we put these two rows together, we have eight blocks; now if we put next row and the next row together, we have 16 blocks, eventually coming to 32 blocks. We help the child develop the mathematical understanding of the multiplication process — that eight rows of four blocks makes 32 blocks altogether and that we write the math function as $8 \times 4 = 32$. Now the child has the concrete basis upon which to understand this math function — the child created the structure and at the appropriate time the teacher helps the child understand the math functions contained within the structure. The learning and teaching proceed from the concrete to the abstract to further the development of math learning.

The children are not only keenly interested in these processes — both building and mathematics, but they also demonstrate their continued interest in math and their capacity to perform mathematics. At about this time I am told there are 2,000 classrooms in Toronto using my "Structures" math program.

Una In my work with teachers and parents, I'm constantly asked about the value of play in education. Why are children playing in school, they're supposed to be learning, not playing? Why is it that play always seems to draw so much criticism?

Otto I think that play draws this kind of criticism so frequently because parents seem to accept that babies and toddlers are able to play, and they think there is some value in that, but in effect, it's not play, it's really learning. The children are doing very specific things. They're dealing with sensory-motor organization. They're dealing with hand-

eye co-ordination. They're dealing with all sorts of processes that go on in the thinking realm. If we can help parents to understand that the play that the child is doing at that age is as important as the play that the child's going to do at 5, 6, and 7, then I think that will help them to understand what the value of play is in educational terms.

There are three different kinds of play at least. There is play that is in the classroom, what we're calling "educational play," there's play at home, what we'll call "domestic play," and there's play outside, what we'll call "recreational play." I think that parents have to understand that we approach these different kinds of play in different ways, that what we do in educational play is not just saying to the kid, "Go ahead and play, I'm busy. Go and play in the livingroom. Go and play downstairs. Go and play with your games. I'll call you when dinner's ready." They view that as play, and in a sense they denigrate it because they're saying, "You go keep busy while I'm busy. I don't know what else to tell you. I don't know how to involve you with me." If we use that kind of play in our classrooms, then I think we are in error.

We need to help parents understand how educational play is of value in the classroom. We also need to help parents understand that there has been an enormous body of literature on the value of educational play. We have data that goes back to the 1940s which points out longitudinally that those children who have been involved in play are more liable to finish school and go on to a university, and that their academic grades during their time in school will also be significantly higher than those of children who were not involved in this kind of play-based educational system. So play has a history. It's not just something which someone suddenly thought of, "Hey, look, the teachers have a lot of work to do, they can send the kids to play just as the parents do at home." I think that's also given play a very bad name because it's been used as a time filler. In schools, I'm not using play as a time filler, I'm using it as the basis for the curriculum, the foundation for learning.

Una Otto, you have personally conducted many research studies in the area of play. Could you please share some of

that significant work with me?

Otto One piece of research we did was a longitudinal study, where we started in kindergarten and went up to the end of Grade 2. Unfortunately, we weren't able to continue because of problems at the Board. However, we were able to point out that children who had at least one year of a play-based educational system in contrast to those who did not have any play at all functioned more effectively in their reading and reading comprehension than those children who had no play at all. The children who had three years of a

there were changes in behaviour such as less temper tantrums, less temper outbursts, less pulling and demanding and hitting of the teacher and each other, less screaming and yelling and swearing. On the positive side, the children were now using words that were appropriate, they were also making scrapbooks, they were interested in what the teacher had to say, they were asking the teacher about how to do things, they were talking to each other. We looked at these children following their summer holidays and we had the teacher come back and tell us what the children were like when they

"... when children are playing, they are elaborating for themselves the whole business of what a problem is ..."

— Otto Weininger



play-based curriculum were more effective in reading and in the comprehension of their reading than the children who had one year of a play-based system, who were more effective than the children who had no play and were in ordinary teacher-structured classrooms. We also found that those children in a play-based curriculum showed higher motivation to want to learn and a higher self-esteem than the children who were not involved in such a curriculum. So, in effect, that piece of research points out that, yes, play is of value from an educational point of view.

In another piece of research I worked with children who were in schools but had been referred to me because of a dual diagnosis — they had low intellectual scores and they also had a physical disability. When we involved those children in play with the teacher, and this play involved reading stories to them and helping them enact the stories, and only over a period of six weeks, we found that

were leaving in June, and what they were like when they came back in September. The teacher said that she was amazed, that the children had retained what they had when they left in June and ordinarily that doesn't happen. These are only two examples of some of the work that we have done. There is a very large body of research dealing with cognition as well as socio-emotional aspects in terms of the positive aspects of play.

Una As you know, not all administrators and teachers hold play in such high esteem. How do you think we can help educators understand the value of play more fully?

Otto One of the things we have to do is to provide educators with the opportunity to not only see what happens in a play-based program, but also to understand the research that has gone on. I don't think that we can try to sell play as

a "motherhood" thing. I try to be very hard-nosed about play because most people think that the area is so soft, so mushy. I would like to see our faculties of education provide more opportunities for teachers to recognize what a play-based program actually is by working with a trained master teacher, and along with that there must be some theoretical aspects provided in class to help them to understand what play does, how play operates and how it deals with the whole child, and also, as I've mentioned, the kind of research that's gone on. We also have to be able to help teachers, through the faculties of education, recognize how we evaluate play.

Often I hear parents, as well as educators, saying, "Well if they play, how do you know if they're learning anything?" I think that evaluation and assessment do not need to use paper and pencil tests, that there really are varying kinds of criteria which the teacher must have at his or her fingertips to be able to evaluate. We use process evaluation, we have a file for each child's work, we keep a weekly record of the various changes involved in language, thinking, problem-solving, motor skills, social skills, etc. These changes keep us evaluating whether a child is developing academically and which play-based materials need to be introduced. Our observations help us determine how the play themes should and/or can be enriched. A knowledge of child development is required as this enables the teacher to recognize how each child is developing academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Observations are possible because of the play-based curriculum. The teachers have the opportunity to observe and take notes as the children work on their projects. It's not just the evaluation that's the important aspect, it's that as a result of the evaluation we can ask how do we extend the play themes so that in fact we are helping the children learn and progress to reach curriculum goals.

Una What are some of the problems that we face in terms of getting this message out.

Otto I give a course at OISE called "Play in Education," and the last time I gave the course there must have been about 60 primary teachers in this class. We talked about play-based child-centred education. One of the remarkable things

... at those teachable moments you can actually help a child to acquire some of the specifics that you want them to acquire.

was that as they described what the play-based educational system was, and as I described what a play-based educational system was, there was such a variance that in effect most of the teachers really were not carrying on a play-based system. They were using, perhaps, part of the play-based system, they were interested in play, but they didn't know how to start the program, how to monitor it, how to carry out things so that there were routines that were taught to the children, they didn't know how to evaluate what was going on in the play, and so they became very frustrated in terms of whether or not the children were learning. They didn't know how to evaluate whether they were learning, and often they said, "Well, we have to inter-mix the play with very straight didactic teaching."

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When I said that I didn't think so but that what you have to do is recognize that there are "teachable moments," and that at those teachable moments you can actually help a child to acquire some of the specifics that you want them to acquire. I pointed out that many of the programs that are being called play-based are not even effective programs, and that is something we are very concerned with and, no doubt, parents are very angry with. So that if we're going to have these child-centered play-based programs, and we must have them, they must be not only understood theoretically but practically as well. Teachers must know what they are doing and right now we're not, to my knowledge, helping teachers to understand the play-based child-centred curriculum at our faculties of education.

Una In closing, what message would you like to leave with parents and educators about play?

Otto If we provide the teachers with an understanding of play and of some of the research, if we provide them with a basis, a foundation, from which they can talk to parents, I think that parents will then have a better opportunity to understand what the teacher is trying to do. Often I hear parents say that when they ask teachers about play, they talk in very "airy-fairy" terms. We are all pinned down in this age of financial cutbacks and clawbacks, and we have to be very specific about what the child is learning and in what ways. We have to be able to detail some of the ways in which play acts to help the process of learning. We certainly can talk about visual motor skills, about specific fine motor skills. We can talk about various other kinds of skills as well. We can also help parents to understand how these skills are integrated only through play, that it's only through play that the integration of the various aspects of the learning process occurs. We need to be able to help the teachers answer the questions that parents have, not in a fuzzy way, but in specific ways. That will give parents the knowledge they need about educational play and the teachers the confidence to talk to parents about the specifics of the program.

Una Thank you very much for sharing your research and your experience with *Orbit*.

Non-graded Primary Classrooms

The British Columbia Experience

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Outside the school on the coast of British Columbia the December morning is damp and gray; inside the school, the children in a class of seven and eight year olds are lively, energetic, and enthusiastic as they embark on their learning for the day. In the class of some 25 children, the variety of activities is conspicuous: seven children are writing journals and conferencing with the teacher; four girls are completing a weather calendar and earnestly speculating on the possibility of snow as they count and compare rainy days, foggy days and sunny days; three boys are reading a big book to an older student of the school; four children are rehearsing a class-written play; five girls are selecting costumes for the play and making a draped backdrop with another parent; two boys are recording the results of a science experiment on a class chart. These students are learning in the Primary Program recently implemented in British Columbia's schools.

As a teacher educator, I often seek the opportunity to accompany preservice teachers as they visit schools, either to observe or to teach. For these students, the challenge of trying to understand and become proficient in teaching in the primary grades is both daunting and exhilarating — exhilarating because of the almost palpable learning that is evident in many primary classrooms in British Columbia, and daunting because of the complexity of the classrooms themselves.

The Primary Program

The primary grades in British Columbia's schools are the focus of much attention as they engage in implementing *Year 2000*, the ambitious and broad-reaching educa-

tional plan of the province's Ministry of Education. The Primary Program is the first part of the plan and, following two years of orientation and optional use, is now into the third year of implementation.

Year 2000 is the education plan that resulted from the recommendations of *A Legacy for Learners*, the report of the 1988 Royal Commission on Education. The focus of *Year 2000* is the individual student within a process of life-long learning, and the framework for the plan is based on curriculum and assessment as interdependent and complementary — an approach that supports teachers' decision-making on the basis of student development. In the program for the primary grades, Kindergarten to Grade 3, the key assumption is that children's learning is natural and continuous and cannot be "pigeon-holed" into grade-level expectations. As a result, the defined performance levels which previously existed, and which could be exceeded by many students but which could cause others to "fail" if students did not meet them, are now no longer the "acid test" for promotion or retention. Instead, students progress at a rate consistent with their developmental level of learning.

Continuous Progress and Ungradedness

"Learning should always begin from where the student is, and move forward as the student is able" is an assertion in *The Primary Program* (Ministry of Education et al., 1990, p. 11) that echoes throughout all accounts of the conceptualization and application of the changes in the primary grades.

Kindergarten to Grade 3 is viewed as a period of schooling in which children learn at different rates and in different ways. Instead of grade standards, teachers now use descriptors of progress across

the first four years of schooling. For example, teachers can judge their students' writing development by using a guide which describes learner characteristics from the making of letter-like forms at the initial stage of writing development to fluent writing which occurs at the latest stage in these early years of schooling (p. 95). Teachers throughout the four primary grades use *The Primary Program* developmental descriptors as well as behaviour observations to gauge the progress of the children; these early years are viewed as an extensive episode of growth rather than as four separate year-long periods.

"Continuous progress" and "non-graded" carry the same meaning, but the use of the term non-graded has not been without problems. To some parents non-graded has meant "no grading" which in turn means no monitoring of their children's progress — in fact, teachers now need to know, and do know, much more about each child's progress in order to support the children in their classes. A second misapprehension of some parents has been that non-graded means multi-graded, an arrangement which is regarded as worse than split grades. While the Primary Program could readily accommodate multiple grades or family groupings, such an arrangement was not conceived as part of the program. Given the antipathy of many communities towards split grades, such an arrangement seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.

The approach to the early years of schooling fostered in *The Primary Program* has been welcomed by the vast majority of early childhood teachers who have seen successes in their classrooms when learning experiences were tuned to their students' developmental needs. A primary helping teacher wrote in a hand-out for parents, "at last we are free to do the things we have always wanted to do" (Guthrie, 1992). Support for the philosophy of the Primary Program has also come from experts who, in reviewing *The Primary Program*, have written that "[it] is truly an extraordinary document! It is the most comprehensive and detailed statement of elementary developmental education that I have ever seen" (David Elkind) and have also expressed approval of the program principles as "highly congruent with current thinking about appropriate education for young children."

(Sue Bredekamp, in Ministry of Education et al., 1992, p. 8).

Organizing for Teaching

The emphasis in organizing for teaching in the Primary Program is on the creation of a learning environment that facilitates the varying learning rates and styles of the children. Implicit in the program is the understanding of the nature of learning that has developed over the last 30 years or so: learning is seen as active, meaningful, multi-dimensional, spontaneous, and natural; therefore, the learning environment needs to provide opportunities for these kinds of learning to flourish.

Space: Classrooms have changed from quiet, simply organized areas, controlled by a teacher, to rooms where talk, movement, multiple systems of organization, and both student and teacher decision-making are evident. Individual desks still exist but rarely are they in rows; instead they are usually clustered to form groups of varying sizes that facilitate the children's learning from and with one another. A cleared floor area, once a "fixture" only in Kindergarten and Grade 1, is now usually included throughout the primary grades. Most full-class teaching/learning takes place here where talk, intimacy, and co-operation with fellow classmates can flourish through activities

such as author's chair, readers' theatre, stories, poetry, news, show and share, group story-composing, singing, planning, and so on. The atmosphere created by teaching in this kind of setting is in marked contrast to lessons where a teacher delivered a lesson to children sitting in isolation in their own desks and where participation depended more on knowing a set of rules designed to control rather than on building on the natural discourse of human beings as they communicate and live considerately with one another.

Materials: Classrooms for the primary grades are lively and colourful, print-rich and visually rich, and are designed to encourage children to engage successfully with the materials and activities that constitute a dimension of the learning environment. Class sets of books are absent, as are printed workbooks for "seatwork, repetition, and reinforcement" of skills selected and sequenced by a publishing company. In their places are varieties of books of different sizes, genres, and reading levels, and children use paper and pencils, as well as other media, to develop stories, create representations of their ideas, and engage with meaningful print. Most activities are "open-ended" in that they allow for different levels of engagement according to the child's developmental stage; for example, the writing of stories is not constrained by length expectations or structural requirements. Activities which have a specific outcome, for example the construction of three-dimensional geometrical models, are usually planned to occur when additional adults or older students are there to ensure that each child can be successful. Reading and counting/calculating are tempered to the individual levels of children, and success is supported through individual teaching and by peers who are expected to empathize with their classmates' performances.

Time: Changes have also occurred in the use of time in the primary classroom; timetables are now more speculative than rigid. While each day is still punctuated by recesses, lunch hour, and allocation of specialized teaching spaces, such as the gym or computer room, the rest of the day is planned around the rhythm and pulses of the students' learning. In the class already described, the day began



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with about an hour and a half of concentrated activities that supported literacy development as well as some completion of established routines such as the weather calendars and science observations. Later that morning, the children and teacher spent about an hour writing, planning, and rehearsing their play for their families to watch later in the week. In the afternoon, more work on the play and the writing of final draft stories for families to read on the bulletin board display. And so the necessity to complete endeavours which the class had conceived and developed towards an ambitious finale became the focus of the learners and consumed their time. In most classes, days settle into a pattern of learning activities but these patterns can, unlike a tyrannical timetable, be altered and modified to accommodate the learners and their goals.

The emphasis in the learning environment in the Primary Program classrooms is responsiveness: changes in design of classroom spaces; interesting, inviting, and absorbing learning materials to encourage and sustain participation; flexibility in allocating time for all kinds of learning; and a nurturing and valuing of each child as a member of the learning community of the class and the school.

Curriculum and Assessment

In *The Primary Program*, curriculum and assessment are learner-focussed and are viewed as interdependent and complementary. *The Primary Program* is a foundation curriculum which is intended to be used in conjunction with the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum guides for subject areas defined in *Year 2000*. Some of the subject areas are traditional such as Language Arts English while others, for example Learning for Living, are new subject areas. Significant for teachers is the congruence of the foundation documents with the curriculum guides.

In the primary grades, the principle that learning is an integrating experience — integrating existing knowledge with new knowledge and integrating content areas across the curriculum — is reflected in the weaving of traditional subject areas within learning experiences. For example, a study of the salmon life cycle which at one time was viewed as science now could be acknowledged, depending on the way in which it develops, to sup-

port learning in language, social studies, math, nutrition, art, the spiritual heritage of Coastal First Nations peoples, and so on. The integrated curriculum experiences are united in supporting the learner towards the attainment of the broad goals of schooling, which in the primary grades encompass intellectual development, aesthetic and artistic development, emotional and social development, physical development and well-being, and social responsibility.

**Gone are teacher
record-books of cryptic
test scores, and in their
place is the ongoing
assessment of children
as they learn.**

Assessment and evaluation in the primary grades are based on a naturalistic approach. Gone are teacher records of cryptic test scores, and in their place is the ongoing assessment of children as they learn. This is authentic, for it can include the many ways by which learning is truly evident in the growing child: observations of children as they interact with their worlds; conferences with children that reveal their understanding and their developing sense of themselves as learners and as individuals; outpourings of writings, drawings, maps, diagrams, charts, constructions, and so on that demonstrate progress and learning. The comprehensive nature of naturalistic assessment presents a challenge to the most organized of teachers but, by now, many have devised systems that are manageable and useful: portfolios are used in most classrooms; record keeping is often done on clipboard charts and notebooks; and many teachers use post-it notepads to record and then store observations of children's learning.

Classrooms as Learning Communities

British Columbia's primary classrooms are evolving as teachers build on their teaching successes. Unlike one-shot cur-

riculum changes, the Primary Program is viewed and supported as a process of change: a five-year review of the program implementation and adaptation, including four interim progress reports, is already under way; the change process is supported by projects such as the Teacher as Researcher Project, developed through the Ministry in response to the growing understanding of the researcher dimension of the teacher role; and publications by teachers for teachers, for example the Primary Teachers Association's *Prime Areas*, focus on emerging ideas and teaching practices in the province's primary classrooms.

The Primary Program Review asserts that the evolving Primary Program is "dramatic proof that powerful, consistent theory can be generated and refined by practitioners" (Brian Cambourne in Ministry of Education et al., 1992, p. 9). This claim reflects the fact that the Primary Program is the result of the efforts of primary teachers who have lead and participated in a multitude of committees and who have embraced changes by meeting them as promising challenges.

Teachers continue to develop the Primary Program by reporting on their interpretations of their growing understanding of their practices. Sadler and Takagaki (1992) in writing of their reflective primary classrooms explain, "Teaching becomes an exciting adventure. Sharing insights, trials, errors and successes with each other and with colleagues is essential. The wonderfully creative and enabling process gives you enthusiasm and the courage to risk being a co-learner with the children" (p. 5). Learning is "a serious adventure" for children (Egan, 1988) and is no less so for teachers as they learn more about the possibilities for effecting successful schooling in the primary grades.

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CURRICULUM ISSUES

Some Observations of Literacy Learning

Risky Business, Noisy Business

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"We define reality in terms of metaphors, and then we act on the basis of those metaphors."

— Ken Cadenhead

Some of us, as teachers, develop metaphoric constructions about the way children learn and develop. For example, we may see the classroom as a stage; others may see teaching as a journey of exploration, a journey in which the teacher plays a central leadership role, and so on. When we talk about what we teach, who we teach, how effectively we teach, and how well our learners are developing, our metaphors are informing our talk.

One metaphor that I find useful in this context is that of the teacher as "scaffold builder." Scaffolding is a powerful and apt metaphor for the contemporary role of a teacher of literacy, especially in the early grades. Today's teacher plays a central role in choosing the materials that will be introduced, in providing the structure that ensures that learning takes place, and by helping learners complete

the tasks they undertake. But this "scaffolding" is only temporary. The teacher's ultimate aim is to encourage the students themselves to take a more central role in designing their learning environments by advancing their own interpretations and opinions and defending them against alternatives raised by the teacher and peers alike.

If one were to ask children just beginning school if they could write or read, most of them would answer that they could write; few would answer they could read. The tremendous body of research into early writing development supports this observation that young children see themselves as writers. When I started to teach primary children several decades ago, there was no expectation that writing would receive any serious attention. Any writing that was done was merely copying from my dictation or blackboard texts. We ignored the vast amount of knowledge that young children had about the production of written language.

In today's classrooms one observes kindergartners drawing and scribbling such texts as grocery lists, notes, stories, and even personal journal entries. These eager and confident young language explorers take risks by inventing spellings that attempt to correspond with their informal exposure to written texts in their

environments. Their probing is nurtured and supported by teachers who provide concurrent reading/writing experiences as well as a learning environment in which they can develop control over their written language. These classrooms are language laboratories — linguistic workshops in which the children draw and write about real experiences in their own lives and share their writing with peers. The public nature of writing makes it a risky business. However, young children are willing to take the risk if teachers provide a supportive environment where early writers can make hypotheses, try them out, confirm or disconfirm them, and grow in the process.

Research (Harste et al., 1984) and observation cautions us against too much attention to spelling in these early years (Kindergarten to Grade 2) since spelling can be the biggest constraint that young children see in writing. Who has not known children who realize that there is a "right way" to write and who may temporarily refuse to "spell it like it sounds" or even to write much at all? Teacher encouragement and instruction that supports exploration and invention of language make a difference. Early development in writing is risky for the young writers; it is also noisy.

Kindergartners talk incessantly to themselves and to anything in their environments as they draw/write: their words give their pictures meaning. Teachers tell me that they generate topics and develop these topics by means of this talk. Other colleagues observe that the children match print to pictures, letters to sounds, and learn how "to do school" during these productive talk sessions. Lucy Calkins (1986) has observed that both talking and drawing are necessary adjuncts to writing in Kindergarten and Grade 1, but by Grade 2 drawing becomes less necessary; however, talking with their peers — as rehearsal for writing and for feedback on drafts — increases in importance. Given the appro-

appropriate environment, this can be a period of great growth in a young child's literacy development. Stories are "published" at a great rate. "All-about" or attribute books in which they tell everything they know about a topic, narratives in which personal events are carefully sequenced, and "bed-to-bed" stories which include everything that is remembered from a day's experiences are a few of the most common genres of this period.

The environments described above are obviously designed for the learners. The teachers have established the most favourable conditions in which the students can make meaning for themselves. They place a premium on diversity, on the varied ways by which each of their learners constructs his or her own knowledge from experience in his or her own unique way. The necessary skills are taught not in isolation but in relationship to significant language "events" in which their students are authentically engaged. The emphasis is upon the making of meaning rather than right answers. At this stage in a young person's literacy development, the emphasis must be upon the process of making our own sense of the world and the various conventions we have developed to communicate this meaning to others. Extensive testing is absent from these environments because it can distort the learners' developing conception of what knowledge is by implying that knowledge is a commodity — something that can be reified — something that either their teachers or books can provide.

As writing is an active, constructive process, so it is with reading. Both reading and writing are processes of composition, of meaning-making and communication; both are interplays of mind and text that bring about new meaning. However we try to explain theoretically the connection between reading and writing, it is apparent that these two processes depend on one's exposure to and uses of written language. Not much attention was paid to this very promising relationship in my early days of teaching; in fact, we did not encourage our children to put pencil to paper until they had "learned to read" — which in retrospect makes me shudder at the missed opportunities to make my students' early literacy development more rich and reasonable.

You see, we had to get our children *ready to read*. This meant that there was

a necessary level of preparation children should attain before beginning formal reading instruction. Visual discrimination, alphabet and word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, and auditory discrimination were listed as predictors of reading readiness. Hence many tedious months were spent directly teaching these prescribed "readiness" skills to get children "ready" to read. We must have

Emergent literacy recognizes that children acquire knowledge about oral and written language before coming to school.

been oblivious to or intentionally ignored the fact that most of our children already had some control over the reading process, being able to read a variety of texts from their environments — stop signs, food labels, and so on. And we kept what children's literature was available out of reach until they were "ready" for it. What a literary wasteland those "reading readiness" months were!

Fortunately the term "reading readiness" has disappeared (or has been redefined) into a new concept called "emergent literacy" (Morrow, 1989). Emergent literacy recognizes that children acquire knowledge about oral and written language before coming to school. Of course the degree of this knowledge depends upon the social and linguistic contexts (e.g., the community and parental priorities) from which the children come. But the research is clear: children who have had meaningful experiences with print — have been read to often and have experimented with writing — come to school more ready for school reading programs than those who have not had these exposures (Mason & Allen, 1986). The latter lack basic knowledge about the functions of print and the terms we use when talking about print like "word", "letter," and "sound." The ability of these children to recognize words in print relates to their preschool activities with written language. If these print

encounters have been absent from some of our children's experience, we must build a scaffold in which they can acquire them. We do this by immersing them in print: signs and labels everywhere; daily language experience charts; regular shared book experiences; and, most crucial of all, opportunities to write.

When Gunderson and Shapiro (1988) compared the vocabulary produced by children in a writing-focussed Grade 1 with vocabulary they would have encountered in a basal reading series, they found that the young writers produced 18 times the number of words found in their readers. It is interesting to note that as we begin to integrate literature and writing activities into our early literacy programs, the vocabulary of our children begins to take on a "literary" tone. When asked why she had used a certain comparison in a story she had written, a six-year old replied, "Because my readers would understand it." The reading-writing connection is alive and well in many of our early primary classrooms.

I will conclude these observations on early literacy teaching and learning by commenting upon another kind of "scaffold" that has been a characteristic of early reading instruction for decades but which is now being reconsidered. The various "stage" theories of early reading acquisition no longer fit comfortably with our current concept of emergent literacy. Any early primary teacher knows that young children bring a wide range of literacy skills to their school literacy opportunities and that they make meaning of texts according to the language system, the content, and their background knowledge of the world. This makes the process of learning to read particularly idiosyncratic and rather inimical to being squeezed into prescribed "stages."

Research by people like Sulzby (1985) and Weaver (1988) suggests that beginning reading progresses across age levels developmentally. Sulzby in her studies of the emergent storybook reading of preschoolers and children at the beginning and end of Kindergarten found that the children, when asked to read or "pretend-read" a story, at first used oral language-like structures but later used written language-like structures.

Weaver has suggested phases that children may go through in early reading development, similar to those in spelling

instruction. I have summarized Weaver's observations below.

Phase 1: Schema-emphasis (prephonemic spelling stage) Children exhibit reading-like behaviour, turning pages and "reading" from prior knowledge of story and picture-clues.

Phase 2: Semantic/Syntactic (invented spelling stage) Children continue to use schematic knowledge and picture clues but begin to read some words in context. Miscues likely fit the context semantically and syntactically but may not match the actual words on the page.

Phase 3: Grapho-phonemic (transitional spelling stage) Children tend to read exactly what is on the page using "sounding out" strategies — exhibiting an over-reliance on the grapho-phonemic cueing system. This phase can occur anywhere from the end of Kindergarten to Grade 2.

Phase 4: Simultaneous-use (using mostly conventional spelling) Children are able to orchestrate all of the language cueing systems (semantic, syntactic

and grapho-phonemic) to sample and predict text.

If these phases are used only, as Weaver suggests, as developmental levels not tied to any age or grade, they will not become neat, little Procrustean beds for our young literacy students. It's worth repeating here that young learners bring a wide range of literacy knowledge to their early school experiences and use that knowledge in their efforts to reconstruct texts. It would be pernicious to attempt to fit children into ill-fitting predetermined stages or phases.

In the observations above I have tried to profile the early language learner as an active, social, and mobile linguistic investigator who requires a rich print environment, opportunities to interact with written language, literacy programs that focus on broadening his or her experiential background, choices in what to write and read about, and teacher-modelling of the reading and writing processes; most important of all, meaning-making must be at the centre of language activities where the literacy skills are learned in the context of real reading and writing situations.

The metaphor of scaffolding to reflect our task as early literacy teachers appears to be an apt one. However, the choice of one's metaphor is only the beginning. It's the transformation of that metaphorical construct into principles and strategies of effective teaching that will really determine our success. This will be risky and noisy business, too.

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Mathematics Education in the 90s

Math Is Not Just Numbers It Is Life

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Last week I visited an elementary school to talk with the staff about the purchase of some new mathematics texts. I took the opportunity to discuss some of the current directions in mathematics curriculum, including Ontario Ministry of Edu-

cation and Training and Board initiatives. The teachers reacted as do most of us during these times of rapid change, with some basic questions. What will be changed? Why do we need to change? How can we deal with so many outcomes in the new *Common Curriculum*?

Ministry of Education documents such as *P1J1* and *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions* have espoused a mathematics curriculum that promotes a philosophy of actively involving children

in learning mathematics concepts. Consequently a generation of primary teachers are familiar with Piagetian ideas and strategies. That same approach still underpins current thinking about mathematics education. What has changed considerably in the interim is the attitudes and views relating to testing, assessment, and the impact of technology on mathematics. Two recent documents from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the Ontario Association for Mathematics Education (OAME) discuss mathematics education in the '90s.

By far the most influential recent paper on mathematics learning and teaching in North America is *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (NCTM, 1989). The document outlines a number of implications in mathematics education for young children (ages 4 to 9).

The NCTM document generated a discussion among Ontario mathematics educators and has resulted in a joint ini-

tative between the Ontario Association for Mathematics Education and the Ontario Mathematics Co-ordinators Association to develop strategies to assist teachers in re-focussing on mathematics education at the same time as the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training is producing a draft: *The Common Curriculum and Provincial Standards in Mathematics (Grades 3, 6, 9)*.

The OAME/OMCA document is titled *Focus on Renewal of Mathematics Education* (1993) and states the following key components for all mathematics programs:

Communication

Mathematics is a language of communication. Language plays an important role in helping students describe their understanding of mathematical concepts and ideas. All children should have many opportunities to read, talk, and write about mathematics. When students are actively involved in constructing their own understanding of mathematical concepts and interacting with classmates, they clarify their thinking, understand, and begin to appreciate the ideas of others.

Mathematical Reasoning

Young children develop their mathematical reasoning with experiences in physical and concrete contexts. As they grow, they become more capable of formal reasoning. The teacher's goal should be to provide appropriate experiences, so that all students can believe that they have the ability (or power) to understand and do mathematics.

Problem Solving

The ability to solve problems is a key goal for mathematics curricula. From international and provincial testing and teachers' own experiences, it is clear that many students find this difficult. Problem solving is the process by which children experience the usefulness and relation of mathematics to real life. It is a process and application which should be consistently interwoven with all areas of mathematics — not simply numeracy. As adults we often need assistance in solving real-life problems. Hence we should ensure that children have many similar opportunities to co-operate with others in the process of representing problems and in developing strategies for

solving them. Classrooms should provide a rich environment for problem-solving experiences based on real-life contexts, from real data sources, and including shared experiences.

Mathematical Connections

The draft *Common Curriculum* asks teachers to begin to focus on learning that is based on integrated outcomes. Traditionally, mathematics in the elementary school has consisted of the strands of arithmetic, measurement, and geometry. It is important that students see connections between different ideas in mathematics and between ideas in mathematics and other areas of the curriculum. Teachers will need opportunities to collaborate in developing effective interconnections between the six strands of the mathematics program and in developing practical connections between mathematics and other curricular areas.

The Role of Technology

In the 1990s the role of calculators and computers is a natural outgrowth of the use of appropriate manipulative materials to help students develop understanding of new concepts. For example, the calculator may be used as early as Grade 1 to look at number patterns, such as step counting, 2, 4, 6, 8,.... Such activities lay the foundation for conceptual understanding of multiplication as repeated addition and for problem-solving with patterns. Computers and calculators are tools which children must learn to use appropriately. There should be access to a computer in every classroom with suitable programs so that children have the opportunity to explore and discover concepts rather than simply practising number facts or skills. Technology can form an important means of providing the semi-concrete bridge between concrete experiences with manipulatives and abstract mathematical ideas. An example would be to use blocks to model graphs and to set up a spreadsheet to represent information graphically.

The Formative Years

Children enter Kindergarten having a variety of experiences related to mathematics. The following vision of the mathematical program for the early years

of formal schooling is stated in OAME/OMCA document.

The program builds on the experiences with number, shape, measurement, and problem solving that children have before entering school. An appropriate mathematics program is based on experiences with intellectual, social, spiritual, physical, and emotional development and uses play as a means for learning mathematics. At this early stage, structured play experiences with concrete materials, both individually and co-operatively, provide practice for new skills and opportunities to solve real problems.

Real opportunities and resources are presented to develop mathematical thinking, and there is a focus on experiences with number, shape, measurement, and problem solving. This focus will be brought out in an integrated way. Through games, literature, dramatic play, cooking, science, technology, and art, children will learn to experience mathematics as a natural part of life and not as a series of artificial exercises.

In discussing the need for curricular reform in mathematics, NCTM views traditional primary level mathematics programs as narrow in focus with an emphasis on rote learning (NCTM, 1989). Reasoning, problem solving, and the development of mathematical insight are seen as areas that should be emphasized.

This is true to a lesser extent in Ontario. The Ministry's recent documents have consistently emphasized the need for a balanced mathematics program. However, it is clear that we have some work to do in developing programs that actively involve children in creating their own understandings, that connect mathematics to real life and focus on problem solving. The documents published by NCTM (1989) and OMCA/OAME (1993) describe the following key elements for a primary mathematics program.

Problem Solving

The ability to solve problems is one of the main goals in the mathematics program. Problem solving is an important life skill and should be integrated throughout the mathematics program.

Increased Emphasis

- solving real problems that are relevant to the child's world

- developing a range of problem-solving strategies
- linking problems to other curricular areas
- examining patterns and relationships in a variety of concrete settings

Decreased Emphasis

- using clue words to identify which operations to use in a problem
- solving disconnected or contrived “story” problems strategies
- practising routine-type word problems

Number Sense and Numeration

Number sense and computational facility are more important than ever. Once children have developed their understanding of these they must also begin to decide which computing methods and tools to use in various real-life situations. For example, it is not only important that Grade 1 children memorize single digit addition and subtraction facts, it is more important that they also begin to have an understanding of these operations in real contexts and have a sense of what these numbers mean and how they are related to each other.

Increased Emphasis

- focus on number sense — that is, sense of number meanings and relationships
- understanding place value from experiences in grouping various concrete materials
- meaning of fractions and decimals from concrete experiences
- estimating quantities in meaningful situations
- teaching number concepts and operations meaningfully, by using patterns, concrete and pictorial models

Decreased Emphasis

- formalizing reading, writing, and ordering numbers symbolically at an early stage
- memorizing rules and practising skills without a meaningful content

Spatial Sense and Geometry

The child’s world abounds in spatial relationships. Students will develop *an intuitive sense* for their surroundings (spatial sense) when shape is explored with familiar objects in their environment.

Increased Emphasis

- connecting geometry to other strands of mathematics (e.g., measurement, patterning) and to other curriculum areas (e.g., art, technology, social studies)
- developing a sense of spatial relationships and the ability to visualize
- using 2-D and 3-D manipulatives and computers for active investigation

Decreased Emphasis

- memorizing rules, definitions, and formal vocabulary

Measurement

Measurement can be viewed as arithmetic in action. It has practical applications that we all need to function in life. Estimation is a key skill that should develop naturally from practical measurement activities. Sometimes an estimate is all that is required.

Increased Attention

- the process of measuring with non-standard and later standard units
- actually measuring using concrete materials
- estimating measurements
- relating measurement to other areas of mathematics (e.g., geometry, patterns) and to other curricular areas (e.g., art, science, technology)

Decreased Attention

- using conversions between units of measurement out of context

Patterning and Algebra

Patterning is a powerful concept in understanding our world. By exploring patterns, students come to see connections between mathematical ideas and the world around them. Practical work in understanding various patterns in number, real shapes, data collections, and measurement is a necessary building block for the more abstract ideas of algebra.

Increased Emphasis

- recognizing and describing patterns in number, shape, and data collections
- using concrete materials to model patterns and problems
- discovering and recording relationships in the other mathematics strands

Decreased Emphasis

- moving to semi-concrete models too soon
- using numerical expressions for patterns in isolation
- manipulative symbols

Data Management and Probability

Data management is linked to all other curricular areas. In real life, collecting, organizing, displaying, and analysing data has become one of the most widely used applications of mathematics. It is an area of mathematics that should be completely integrated with other curricular areas. In addition to concrete graphs, children should begin to use computers to display data. Probability may be dealt with informally in discussing games or everyday life situations, such as weather prediction.

Increased Emphasis

- collecting data from sources meaningful to the children
- organizing the data with concrete graphs, as well as pictorial and symbolic graphs
- interpreting the displays of data
- posing and solving problems based on collecting and organizing data

Decreased Emphasis

- formally graphing isolated data at an early age

Through the changes in emphasis envisioned in the NCTM standards and in the OAME/OMCA focus document, students will become more confident in their abilities to use their growing mathematical power to make sense of new problem situations in the world around them. Perhaps then all children can say that math is not just numbers. It is life.

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Focus on Renewal of Mathematics Education is available at a cost of \$4.00 from OAME, c/o Don and Carol Attridge, 1 Southdale Drive, Markham, Ontario, L3P 1J6.

Talking Primary Physical Education

Let Me Count the Ways

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In this article, I will focus on the talk, the approaches, some stories, and some possible directions that can aid in organizing and making sense of the physical education curriculum and resource materials.

The language of the various subject disciplines has strayed from the "learning" and "teaching" language of education; at the same time the language of education is brewing up a complex language of its own. It is easy to see how frustrating it can be for parents, students, student teachers, administrators, and current teachers to try and pull the pieces together, let alone hook them into something that makes sense.

This understanding in no way dampens my appreciation for diversity. Without subduing the "fires" of creative and courageous thought, I sense we need to ask interpreters to help us with the patchwork.

Why should a generalist teacher learn the language of physical education? Before one sets out to interpret the language of another subject matter, one must be moved to believe that such learning would be significant and meaningful.

Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" (1985) represents one of the most inclusive accounts of mind theory. It does not separate mind from body from art, but draws upon the synergistic potential of engaging all the different intelligences. Gardner supported the

physical way of knowing in the following:

"A description of use of the body as form of intelligence may at first jar. There has been radical disjunction in our recent cultural tradition between the activities of reasoning, on the one hand, and the activities of the manifestly physical part of our nature ... on the other. This divorce between the mental and physical has not infrequently been coupled with the notion that what we do with our bodies is somehow less privileged, less special, than those problem-solving routines carried out chiefly through the use of language, logic or some other relatively abstract symbolic system." (pp. 207-208)

Pratt (1980) suggested:

"The neglect of physiological objectives in the curriculum literature is symptomatic of the separation in schools of mind and body and of the general failure of educators to promote children's well-being." (p. 314)

I would like to return to my title "Talking Physical Education — Let Me Count the Ways" as an example of how one can see the language of this subject matter and its two distinctive underlying theories in a "language-friendly" way. Then I will outline a third approach to physical education which incorporates these two theories in an integrated child-centred way.

1. The Movement Approach

In 1947, Rudolf Laban's theory of human movement spread through the dance world like fire and wound up securing a dominant place within the school curriculum. His *body, space, effort, and relationship* groupings represent the foundations of most primary physical education curricula on the country. Rus-

sell (1993), in studying Laban, commented on the number of ways his taxonomies have been rewritten and revised by various curriculum and textbook writers. No doubt some of the language is vague and can be perceived as somewhat obscure — "descriptive analysis, functional movement, indirect, indulging attitude, manipulative, non locomotor activity." This was not Laban's intent. I sense he wanted to be as comprehensive as possible, not permitting any movement variable he could think of to slip away.

I created a Laban Bingo game to introduce students to the language of Laban in a fun but functional way. As a term is called out, for example "mirroring," students must perform their interpretation of the term in small groups before they can put a marker on their cards. Some of the questions they have asked after the experience have been:

- 1) What is the difference between bending and twisting?
- 2) What is the difference between long and elongated?
- 3) What is the difference between up and high?

Laban's vocabulary is full of relationships. It is so comprehensive it can be difficult at first to digest. Yet movement theory plays an important role in physical education. Its coatrack of variations (levels, directions, and shapes) promotes endless movement experiences for practising culturally defined skills or for creating new movements on their own.

The "other" theory which usually is regarded as an opposing line of thought is the skills approach to learning physical activity. It is summarized below.

2. The Skills Approach

The skills approach to learning physical activity has not always been something that the general public has been willing to grasp especially when each sport area has identified very specific expectations in separate visions of quality activity programs. At the secondary level, this has led, I believe, to a reduction in the activity offerings because physical education specialists are saying, "I'm not a dance specialist," "I'm not a racquet specialist," "I'm not a swim instructor," "I'm not a gymnast," but "I am a basketball coach" or "I am a volleyball coach...". My con-

cern with organizing a program based on the perception of speciality is that this rationale is limiting and does not consider the student's needs.

So who is to say what the student's needs are? Perhaps the answer lies in both movement theory and skills theory. Maybe they are not so distant cousins after all.

3. The Pattern Approach

In looking through many curriculum resources, I sensed there might be an easier way to grasp the concepts of basic movement principles in movement theory by simply trying to identify common essential or dominant movement patterns in physical activity.

In 1988, I had the distinct pleasure of working with Keith Russell and Len Gustard at the University of Saskatchewan. We had numerous conversations about the rationale for balanced programs in physical education. We kept asking ourselves, "What is it we should teach future teachers?" We felt our teachings of the opposing theories only led to dualistic choices where teachers from the elementary panel would typically join the "movement camp" and teachers from the secondary panel would typically join the "skills camp." What emerged from our discussions was a strong sense that dominant movement patterns could be helpful in defining what one learns in the physical environment. Chart 1 illustrates the marriage between the ten "moving" patterns we identified and the movement and skills approaches.

The ten moving patterns fit comfortably into a ten-month school year. Even though it should be expected that patterns will be reviewed at other times in the year (for example, sending with receiving), it still seems possible to emphasize one set of essential physical learnings per month:

September	locomoting
October	holding
November	sending
December	receiving
January	landing
February	springing
March	rotating
April	swinging
May	following
June	dodging

It is important to stress that identifying patterns in physical education does not completely describe the subject matter. Fitness factors also contribute to the acquisition of skills or the execution of movement.

Mapping Out a Pattern

Probably the most significant role physical activity can play rests in its connection to personal and social development. "Sneetches and Other Stories" describe some snapshots of physical education based on the Moving Pattern Approach

with a strong accent on social development.

As the planning time teacher at Burnhamthorpe Public School in Mississauga, I was assigned duties that included teaching physical education, music education, special education, and English as a secondary language to students in Grades 1 through 4 during the 1990-91 school year. My long term plans were tentative at first, to allow for integration of various classroom themes. The plans gradually took shape as I dialogued with the students and other staff members about important themes throughout the

Chart 1: Ten Moving Patterns in Physical Education

<i>Moving Patterns</i>	<i>Movement Approach</i>	<i>Skills Approach</i>
locomoting	transferring weight: walking, galloping, sliding, scooting, "locomotor"	running, skiing, "footwork"
holding	shaping, stopping, stabilizing, "non-locomotor"	balancing, supporting, hanging, gripping, towing, "ready position"
sending	passing, bouncing "manipulating" tossing, striking	throwing, kicking, batting, shooting, serving, spiking, fielding
receiving	trapping, scooping	catching, lobbying, juggling
following	mirroring, shadowing dribbling	relaying, defensive playing, dance formations
dodging	tagging, spacing	dribbling, releasing, offensive playing
landing	absorbing, controlling	rolling, falling, diving, sticking
springing	hopping, galloping, skipping, punching	leaping, jumping, vaulting
rotating	bending, twisting, curling	rolling, turning, stroking, cartwheeling
swinging	hooking, stretching, relaxing, pumping	circling, gliding, beating, skipping

year (Halloween, Book Reading Week, Fit week, and so on).

I intended to keep a running log of my daily reflections, but as the days and weeks went by, so too did my good intentions. Therefore, my recollections lack the richness that anecdotal notes could have provided. Now, two years later, I am destined to rely on my enthusiastic but rusty memory of what I've affectionately subtitled "Sneetches and Other Stories."

The month of September started and ended with a fun salute to Dr. Seuss. His "sneetches" were instrumental in helping me articulate "sending" — the moving goal, and "sharing" — the social goal for the month. In addition to communicating a warm welcome, safety rules, and expectations of good manners, the sneetches also provided opportunities for students to share their goals and ideas for a fun physical education experience.

I remember reading the Sneetches story after a name game and a vigorous game of Rock'n'Roll Baseball. I asked for volunteers in the Grade 3 class to read parts of the "plain-bellied sneetch" and the "star-bellied sneetch." The story basically reveals that "no kind of sneetch is the best on the beaches" (p.24)! We discussed how the plain-bellied sneetch felt when no one wanted to be his partner or play ball with him. We talked about what we could do in gym class to make sure everyone had fun. As students left, I still remember getting a "high five" as they marched out singing the tune "Nobody Does It Like Our School."

Another story that made a lasting impression happened during Fair Play Week. A Grade 1 class warmed up by rotating through a "Role Model" circuit where students practised various fitness tasks with small groups. For example, a picture of Marnie Bean, a Canadian rower, was posted on one wall. At this station, groups tried to hold a diver's stance by balancing on their toes with their eyes shut. Each group eagerly moved to their next circuit stations when the background music was put on pause — no whistle, no loud screams, just a flick of a switch!

In the main part of the lesson, students, in pairs, lined up to pass balls to each other, first by rolling, then by bouncing and then by tossing from various distances. They were encouraged to do and say anything they could to help their part-

ner receive the ball successfully. I provided one tip at a time before each pair practised the various sending and receiving drills. The sending skills were reviewed so that partners could use good throwing skills to help their partners receive the ball. The receiving tip started out with phrases such as "bring the ball to your TV set — the biggest part of your body." In other words, use your body to stop the ball from getting away. The next tip involved moving so that the TV set would be right in line with the ball. Such tips reinforced some general principles of receiving that can potentially influence future success in various sports that place a high value on receiving skills (football, basketball, etc.).

We followed up with a quick game of "Hoop Ball," where the students' sending and receiving skills were applied in game action. I was pleased to hear the students continue to reinforce the catching tips during the game.

At the end of class, I introduced a "Fair Play Award" and let the students know that in the next month I would be asking for people to volunteer the names of classmates who deserved to be recognized. We talked about fair play and how it also connected with being helpful. Three students were nominated to sign the mural and I printed the reasons under each name: "Taylor let me go first in line," "Christopher threw the ball softly to me so I could catch it," and "Jasmine passed the ball to me so I could score in the Hoop Ball game." Each time we met over the next month, students continued to fill in the mural. Names could be repeated only after everyone in the class had been recognized.

In January, I recall the gym being set up for gymnastics. Previously, the students had worked on landing and holding skills at the floor level. This time, the environment had a rich assortment of wall bars, box horse, and benches. Our moving focus was "rotation" with the social goal of "Reaching for the Stars." After the fundamental skills of rotating around the "sommersault axis," "longitudinal axis," and "cartwheel axis" were mastered, the class then proceeded to play the Golf Game.

The Golf Game was made up of 18 holes at both the "par" and the "birdie" level. Apart from introducing some of the basic ideas about golf, the stations proved to be a rewarding way for stu-

dents to work in their own comfort zone. For example, the students could practise a full turn on one foot on the floor (a par), or some might "Reach for the Stars" by trying a full turn on one foot on a box top or bench (a birdie).

An Exercise In Synthesis

In my image of this class I am far removed from teacher-directed activity. The students are making many choices while executing numerous gymnastic skills that contribute to their experience base of landing, springing, locomoting, holding, swinging, and rotating. Not only are they performing skills that surpass my expectations of the activity, but they are talking "moving pattern talk." They are not simply mimicking actions or pictures. I sense this talk situation not only influences their learning, but it gives them the opportunity to reflect on their activity which increases their motivation to set higher goals.

The intent of this exercise in synthesis is not to create a new monster — another model to digest! The terms have been chosen so that the "what" in physical education can easily be connected to the "how" of physical outcomes. Curriculum writing teams need to keep in mind that teachers and students will try and learn the language of physical education if they believe it is worthwhile and if they sense they have the potential to grasp the "talk." If teaching physical education is perceived as a "Where's Waldo" adventure, even the most shiny and new curriculum will not change the face of resignation from clutter. Physical activity should be something everyone "puts on" everyday. It should not be considered a subject that has overstayed its welcome in the "core" curriculum, simply because we have not taken the time to communicate the distinguishing features of its identity.

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Strategies for Bringing Art into the Primary Class

Art Appreciation for Young Children



Photos courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Figure 1

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“Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.”

— John Berger

Children can be taught to become informed and critical visual consumers. They understand that a visual image can be discussed, reviewed, and analysed. Most important of all, individual decisions can be made about images and messages found in the electronic media as well as

through the printed media found in ads, billboards, or posters in the community.

There are many ways teachers can approach art appreciation activities in their classroom. The Ministry of Education and Training for Ontario as well as individual school boards offer guidance and support for teachers to begin activities in art appreciation. The *Common Curriculum* provides leadership for teachers to get involved in outcome-based education. Many of the criteria in the area of the arts rely on significant instruction in both informal and formal art appreciation. This is a good sign for the future and developing visual literacy in our schools.

Teachers will require support in the form of ideas, approaches, and strategies. The following information is a summary of the art appreciation approach contained in the draft visual arts support document for primary teachers of the Metropolitan Separate School Board. Although I was responsible for the art appreciation component, my colleagues Mario Gasparotto and Margie Marotta are equally involved in the creation of strategies and approaches listed here.

While there are informal and formal levels of instruction, both involve the principles and elements of design. Discussions and activities that involve the elements of design such as colour, line, texture, and shape will encourage young children to create artwork with that knowledge. As well, children will use the appropriate language of art when they discuss the elements of design in their work and the work of others. Informal comments reinforce previously taught concepts. Both informal and formal levels of discussion and activity are vital to reinforcing concepts.

The following art appreciation activities may take place at any point in a lesson. They may be incidental, short lessons or discussions. Often these activities may be planned as part of a larger discussion or studio activity following a specific outcome involving observation, problem-solving, discovery, or experiential inquiry.

1. Narrative

The narrative approach to art appreciation involves a variety of personal responses based on: placing oneself in the artwork; identifying with a person, place or thing in the artwork; reflecting on what happened just before; or imagining what will take place after the narrative depicted in the artwork. Children may invent or imagine the experience based on the visual imagery. Teachers may choose artwork that allows for various interpretation.

Example: Antoine Plamondon's *La Chasse aux tourtes*, 1853 (See Figure 1.)

- What has taken place in place in this painting?
- Describe the area where this scene takes place.
- What do you think happened just before this scene?

- What will the boys do next?
- Is this a recent painting or one that was painted long ago? Explain.

2. Descriptive

The descriptive approach to art appreciation involves describing the subject matter, materials, and techniques of the artist.

Example: August Rodin's sculpture, *Small Crouching Bather*, c. 1888 (See Figure 2.)

- What or who is this?
- Can you describe the materials the artist used?
- Do you think this material would be hard or soft to touch?
- Can you see smooth texture in this sculpture? Rough texture?
- How do you think the artist wanted us to feel about the experience of the Crouching Bather?



Figure 2

3. Search and Discovery

Search artwork and discover a variety of styles, technique, media, and subject matter. Look for artwork that is reflective of strong themes, mood, or topics. Identify symbols, objects, or colours in the environment that reflect a theme, mood, or topic. Search and discover involves looking for a concept or theme in children's artwork, the work of others or in the environment

Example: Roger Fry's sculpture, *Group: Mother and Child*, 1913 (See Figure 3.)

- Can you find human forms? How many?
- Who do you think the larger form is?
- Locate and describe any important details that help us figure out who the figures in the sculpture are.
- How did the artist convey these feelings to you? (texture, form)
- What name would you give to the sculpture? Give the artist's title and discuss?



Figure 3

- Compare and contrast texture to previous work by Rodin. Note the different materials used.

4. Recall

Children gain knowledge through recall activities regarding specific artworks, concepts, styles, media, and subject matter. In one activity, one child acts as a detective who has recovered some missing artwork. Three other children act as art curators who want to obtain the artwork for their galleries:

- The children need to have a working knowledge of the "missing" artwork.
- The children should be in groups of four (or plan this as a centre activity).
- Each curator may ask four questions involving the artwork's subject matter, style, and media. The detective may only respond yes or no to each. The curator may give the title and artist who has completed the work, and if correct, the detective hands over the artwork. The process continues until all artwork has been handed over.
- If time permits, each child can take a turn at being the detective.

5. Comparative

In this approach, children come to appreciate art by comparing subject matter, media, and technique. Upon studying a selection of work by a specific artist, the children may "spot" the style of that artist and explain through comparative analysis.

Subject Matter — Compare two works that have similar subject matter, such as the



Figure 4



Figure 5

commonly represented Madonna and Child image — for example, *Virgin and Child*, by unknown Canadian artist and *The Holy Family (?) with Angel* by unknown Flemish artist. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

- What story is being told in both artworks?
- What media (painting and wood sculpture) are used?
- Which artwork could you walk completely around?
- What are the differences and similarities?
- Why do you think these works are of Mary and baby Jesus?

Media — Children group works of art in media categories such as painting, print, sculpture, and drawing. Discuss how the selection of media is vital to the message and feeling the artwork conveys. Remember to collect both abstract and realistic artwork as well as art created by women and men. Another important note is to be sensitive to the cultural needs of the children you teach. Collect artwork that reflects a wide variety of cultural backgrounds.

Technique/Style — Children look at and discuss four to six reproductions by an artist. Discuss the mood, colour, shapes, and subject matter in the artwork. The initial responses from children may be written down on chart paper. Later, children can list similarities between the works to determine style. Collect reproductions that have highly recognizable style such as Picasso, Mondrian, Matisse, Carr, and Native Art.

6. Problem-Solving

Problem-solving activities help children make decisions about media, subject matter, style, design and composition.

- Pose problems for children to solve such as “There are no painting tools (brushes).” Children have to brainstorm on different items they could use. Once the items are collected, evaluate how they may be used effectively. Follow up with a studio activity and discussion on artwork that has been created in non-traditional methods such as Jackson Pollock’s painting technique.
- Look at interesting artwork and have children figure out how the work was created. Chart responses. Lead children to create work in the same manner. Discuss the problems encountered

and how the children solved problems with the media.

7. Biographical

Children learn about artists’ cultural background, thoughts, and life experiences that may have effected their artwork.

- An artist of the month could be researched and displayed in a prominent place.

Children may learn and appreciate the subject matter chosen by specific artists. For example, Emily Carr’s love of nature and the strong influence of the native community are apparent in her work.

8. Critique

Critique activities allow children the opportunity to use the language of art while increasing their ability to make informed judgments about works of art created by themselves as well as others.

Initial Response — Critique develops from the initial response “I like it” to the formal response explained through the language of art. Children are encouraged to explain their initial response of “I like this painting.” Ask leading questions such as “What colours do you like in the painting?” Use other art appreciation strategies such as discussing narrative, subject matter, and media to reinforce the language of art.

Formal Response — Once children are accustomed to the language of art, they may reference the elements and principles of design in their work and the work of others.

Once an environment for discussing artwork is established, children will become increasingly aware of their visual environment. Children need to be aware that images are generated by a source. The artwork around us is created by a variety of sources for a variety of reasons. As educators, we can guide children to discover that visual information can be read, understood, and interpreted.

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Television Is Just . . . Different

Kids Watch It, Let's Use It.

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What do you think about when you walk into a room and see a child sitting in front of the TV set? Probably many things, most of which make you feel guilty.

Is there something intrinsically wrong with a child sitting alone in front of a television set? Ask yourself what is the picture in your head in response to this question. What program was the child watching? How long had the child been watching alone? To this point we have said nothing about the age of the child, the kind of program that is on, the length of time he or she has been watching, the time of day. Any details in answer to the question have been your own. Now, ask yourself if there anything intrinsically wrong with a child sitting alone reading a book.

Many parents and teachers will say that there is something wrong with a child sitting alone in front of the TV, but that reading a book alone is a good thing. Why do we respond in this way? Because we have somehow come to the general opinion that there is something intrinsically insidious about television — especially for children — a negative influence. On the other hand, books and reading have the connotation of being positive in their effect.

But what if the scenario of the child watching television is of a young person watching "The Road to Avonlea" alone, and this is the only TV the child has watched all day? And the book scenario is of a 13-year-old sitting alone reading a copy of *American Psycho* that was left

out in the parents' bedroom? This is a loaded image, but it helps us to reconsider the fact that for many parents and teachers, television is itself bad, while books, for some reason, are always good.

Young people seem to have a different perspective about these issues. It's important to listen to what they say about television, especially young people who have done some thinking about it. Here is a comment:

"I can't remember life without television. I've been entertained, educated, amused, sickened, and bored by it. It has enabled me to witness great historical events, and other events I'd rather not see. With the flick of a switch the world was at my fingertips, the great, the glorious, and the stupid. But the choice is mine. I can easily turn it off."

— Sandra, age 18

Television is a very important part of our culture. It's a fact. We can criticize it ad nauseam, but it's not going to go away. We have to learn to live with it. But we will not be able to do this unless we stop our negative railing against the gods of television and begin to see it for what it is — a powerful communication tool that can indeed overwhelm if it is allowed to, or — if seen and used for the things that it does best — can be a wonderful part of our lives.

Let's examine some of the negative statements that are commonly made about television by people who don't understand the medium for what it is. It's often said that television is an anti-social experience, while books are a social experience. This is probably the most simplistic statement made about TV. Certainly if parents allow children to do nothing but sit in front of a television set most of their spare time, they probably will become anti-social and withdrawn. But consider the bookish youngster who does nothing but sit in a corner with a book, ignoring everything else around. A

book — or a morning newspaper — can certainly be a deterrent to conversation. Reading is, by its very nature, a solitary, anti-social occupation. That doesn't mean it's bad.

Another of the common complaints about television is that it is the direct antithesis to reading. If by this broad generality critics are talking about eye movement, concentration, ability to go back and forth, reread or re-examine a story and so forth, the statement has some validity. But what most people mean when they say this is that all TV is bad and all reading is good. And of course that's not true.

Certainly, reading requires skills, both physical and mental, but so does *real* watching of television. If a child, or anyone else, is really watching television, that child is using mind, imagination, and thought processes in a creative and constructive way.

Television is a different activity from reading. So is going to the theatre or to a movie, or taking a walk, or having an argument. But this doesn't mean that one activity is "better" than another. They're simply different. Today's young people are bombarded by many stimuli and many choices, in a variety of media: print, TV, video games, computers, and fax machines. One medium does not replace or supersede or become better than any other. All are useful and valuable in an education/learning environment. Their values depend upon their use.

Another knock against TV is that it destroys language growth. The language of television is said to be in direct opposition to that of the classroom or books.

The English language is a wonderfully flexible and adaptable medium. It expands and changes with time and the impact of other cultures and tongues. If there is any destroying done, television is not the only culprit. One has only to peruse any daily paper to find much devastation of grammar and syntax, as well as questionable usage and meaning. Also, from our experience in the classroom, we know that educators' language is, to say the least, not always the best. Children's language development results from all of their surroundings and influences — visual, verbal, and aural. The major influence and example should be that of the parents.

In all of the common "television-as-

villain” statements, it is always assumed that if children were not watching TV, they would be doing something “useful” or “creative” such as reading, writing, painting, doing the chores, being with the family or whatever. Not necessarily. They might be doing something far worse or just hanging around the corner store or the shopping mall. As for passivity, a 1988 U.S. Department of Education study suggested that there was very little evidence that TV in itself made children cognitively passive. “Creative play” is a term that needs some examination. To our minds, all the play time of very young children is creative, in that it develops imagination and physical prowess.

Some good TV programs, of course, encourage creative activities. At a parents’ night a concerned mother told us about watching her six-year-old son, ill and home from school, glued to morning television. She was concerned that he was just wasting his time. That afternoon, however, she saw him working away on the simple costumes and creations he had seen on one of the morning shows. Programs such as “Mr. Dressup,” “Polka Dot Door,” “Join In,” “Under the Umbrella Tree,” “Fred Penner’s Place,” and YTV’s “Big Comfy Couch” all promote participatory activities. Watching and listening (good skills to develop) come first, and then participation.

And what of the judgment of the children? Do we allow them some room to make their own decisions? Are they just empty slates with no values at all, upon whom the TV screen can write whatever the media moguls choose to put out? Is television really an all powerful medium with the capability to corrupt minds, to form lasting values?

We’ve heard it said that if a dozen readers read a passage from the same book, they would have a dozen different images of the scene, but with television the imagination is stifled, a director does all the imagining for you. It’s true that a director will interpret a scene in a certain way, and different directors and camera people will give us different interpretations. But to say that TV “stifles” imagination is really overstating the case.

The strength of television is that it can bring a world, or many worlds, to a child or an adult to interpret any way they want. The imagination is brought into play in a different way when one watch-

es than it is when one reads. Just as two people might look at Picasso’s “Guernica” and focus on different aspects of the painting and derive different meanings and experience different emotions, so often do film and TV viewers see and interpret dramatic passages, or even commercials, quite differently.

Different media are just that — different — and require a different kind of appreciation, each for what it does best. All media have a place in our world.

A teacher of a Grade 9 English class gave us one of the best examples we’ve found of the use of different media, each for its own value, and the complementary nature of these media. The class was studying the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The students had read the novel. After their first reading, and an analysis of the theme of racial prejudice and various other elements of the novel, the teacher began a comparative examination of the film and the novel. They were now reading the television screen in much the same way as they had been reading the novel in print. Scenes were examined with the stop-start, freeze frame, slow-motion functions of the VCR. Facial expressions, camera angles, blocking of characters, set — all were examined in a

similar way to the examination of the scenes in print. The teacher describes with much pleasure the growing facility of these Grade 9 kids with the technique of film and video, and their obvious pleasure as they could use terms such as “long shot,” “close up,” and the vocabulary that is needed in order to discuss a film.

TV can be used for good or ill. Its meaning comes from the interaction between the screen and the audience. Each brings to this exchange some content, some story, some values. And each is changed by the other. And it’s here that we must begin to look for the power of this medium in the coming together of program and audience, of sender and receiver. We all, young and old, bring something of ourselves to the screen, to receive what is being sent out. With children, the something is the values their parents impart to them. Parents and teachers cannot abdicate this very important role of nurturing in children a set of values and an acceptable way of handling the world and of living in it.

Note: This article is composed of excerpts from The Penguin Guide To Children’s TV and Video by Jack Livesley and Frank Trotz.

Is Testing Teaching?

The Young Child’s Perspective

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What would schooling be like if we made fairness a central concern? This is the question that lies at the heart of my inquiry. Yet, when I raise it with teachers, their polite smiles and tactful comments suggest that they believe it is impractical to think about schools in such a way. In forums where it is possible to probe into the meaning behind these reactions, I

learn a lot about bureaucratic constraints, competing agendas, and problems with North American society. Most often, however, teachers say they dismiss issues of fairness because such concerns distract students from the kinds of activities that will help them do well on standardized tests. Would students be distracted if they were asked to critique the fairness of testing practices? Findings from several studies suggest that to ask young children about fairness and testing reveals their confusion about the nature and purposes of such activities. We also discover that preoccupation with testing interferes with

and often undermines some of the activities intended to promote learning.

Let's begin by imagining the kinds of conversations that might occur when children critique the fairness of testing practices. The following discussion occurred in a second grade class in Lafayette, Indiana, and shows children struggling to understand when copying is akin to cheating and when it is not:

"Is it fair to copy?" asks Sue.

"Not when you're grown up."

"The only way babies learn to talk is to copy. The only way four-and five-year-olds learn to write words is to copy."

"My little brother copies."

"When you get older, like on the ISTEP [a State-mandated standardized achievement test], it's wrong."

"No, cause in an exam it's what you know," says George....

"You don't learn from copying. If you did that for a long time you wouldn't learn anything."

"It's like lying. It's a hard thing to get out of."

"Is there any reason to copy?" Sue asks.

"Like if you're from a different country, you have to copy to learn words."

"Copying words in your spelling dictionary is all right."

"OK, I think I hear two things coming out here," says Sue, summing up. "Is this what I'm hearing? First of all, you can copy to learn."

A chorus of "Yes!" is her answer. "But when you have to show what you have learned, you should not copy." The chorus again signals assent.

(Abstracted from Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993, pp. 46-47)

Two things could be going on in this discussion. Children could be revealing a confusion about whether helping is appropriate for tests. They could also be having difficulty determining whether the conversation is about testing or learning. We'll consider both possibilities.

How Should Tests Be Organized?

First, the possibility that children have an incomplete understanding of the nature of tests is suggested by a study of conceptions of fair testing practices. Children (ages 6 to 12) were interviewed about fair ways to organize a standard-

ized test (Thorkildsen, 1991). They were told about a class in which peer tutoring was permitted during the test and another class where students were required to do solitary work. They evaluated the fairness of each of these practices for different distributions of test scores.

Most of the children said that solitary work was fair, but first and second graders also thought peer tutoring would be fair. Many first graders, for example, thought that peer tutoring was the most fair way to have a test. They assumed that everyone who worked hard would score high and have the same abilities. When

... that children have an incomplete understanding of the nature of tests is suggested by a study of conceptions of fair testing practices.

asked if collaborating on tests would allow teachers to find out what each student knows, these children said things like, "yes, she'll look at their papers and see what answers they got." They were captivated by test scores and talked as if getting answers wrong was unfair.

Slightly older children said that solitary work was most fair, but that peer tutoring would also be fair. They saw a need for solitary work, but did not understand why it was essential for determining what each student knows. These children did not think that wrong answers were unfair, but they did assume that fair testing practices would result in equal outcomes if everyone worked hard. They talked as if students with equal test scores must have equal ability, even if their scores were obtained with the help of a friend.

It was only after about age 10 that most children saw solitary work as a fair way to organize a test, and peer tutoring as unfair. These older children recognized that test scores would be invalid if students helped one another. They also realized that it would be impossible for a teacher to determine what each student knows if they collaborate during a test.

Evidence that these kinds of misunderstandings about the point of testing invalidate their use with young children comes from another study (Wodtke, Harper, Schommer, & Brunelli, 1989). Instructions for standardized tests are rarely explicit about how children should behave during a test. Therefore, young children sometimes call out answers, help one another, copy, and otherwise engage in disruptive behaviour. These behaviours are most marked when teachers conform closely to the testing procedures specified in the administration manual. Yet, findings from the fairness interviews suggest that it would be unwise to assume that children who engage in such behaviours are willfully cheating.

The possibility of good intentions on the part of young children is further supported by teacher reports that they develop a variety of unhealthy stress symptoms during testing. Teachers note that many students become irritable and aggressive, develop headaches and stomach aches, cry, and make frequent bathroom visits (Nolen, Haladyna, & Haas, 1992). The desire to do well in situations they do not fully understand seems to make it difficult for children to succeed. It is no wonder that teachers worry about the implementation and value of standardized tests.

How Much Testing Is Fair?

At one level, young children do not seem to have a clear understanding of how to behave during tests. Yet, they can also be seen struggling to distinguish among the goals of learning and testing. The goals of particular classroom situations are not always easy to define. This becomes evident when we ask them which types of situations should predominate in school.

To determine whether young children (ages 7 to 12) see testing as integral to learning or as something that interferes with learning, they were asked to consider how much testing is fair (Thorkildsen & Schmahl, 1991). They critiqued the fairness of five practices ranging from the use of frequent tests (daily quizzes, biweekly unit tests, and a standardized test) to replacing tests with class discussions. They decided whether each practice was fair and then ranked them in a series of paired comparisons.

The children attended schools with two different teaching philosophies. Some attended schools where direct instruction

was used and improving test scores was a major concern. Others attended a public Montessori school where inquiry and unstructured learning was the focus. It is clear from the dominant theories held by children in these two types of schools that classroom experiences have some effect on their definitions of learning and testing.

In the direct instruction schools, for example, teachers were preoccupied with improving standardized test scores. Teachers taught according to the rather rigid dictates of this traditional approach, demonstrating a skill and asking children to practice it until they became proficient. Learning was organized very much like most schools organize tests. Correct answers were the focus, making it difficult for teachers to allow students to learn anything that did not conform to the edicts of standardized tests.

Most of the children in this school held the theory that school should be organized like a test. They said that students learn by doing tests. Worries about obtaining correct answers seemed to predominate over enthusiasm for the possibility of discovering the unknown. Children did not raise the idea that students need time to prepare for tests or to learn before taking tests. They said that if students take frequent tests and do their own work, they will learn. Otherwise they will not. These children argued that frequent tests were most fair for reasons like, "They'll learn something before they go to the next grade. When the teacher asks them a question, they'll know [the answer]." Frequent tests were selected over one standardized test per year for reasons like, "[If you do all these tests], you're learning it. Every subject they got, they probably learn it better than they have been doing." These responses suggest that direct instruction practices might encourage children to define learning as a test.

This possibility is further supported when the beliefs of children attending the direct instruction schools are compared with those of children attending the inquiry school. Most children in the inquiry school said that tests interfere with learning. They saw tests as serving only a minor purpose in helping teachers decide who should pass to the next grade. They talked as if frequent tests debilitated learning. Tests, in their view, create a paper trail to remind them of all their mistakes. Specifically, many children chose

one standardized test a year, or class discussions and no tests as most fair. They did not seek to avoid evaluation but saw it as integral to the process of discovering new ideas. When choosing classroom discussions as fair, for example, they said things like, "The teacher could just ask them questions. Then if they make mistakes, the teacher could correct them and they won't feel bad. Here [in unit tests] they write their mistakes down and it's hard to forget that you made them ... It's hard to fix them."

Sometimes children selected one standardized test as most fair for reasons like, "if they write their answers down, then they won't have to feel embarrassed in front of their friends if they don't know the answer when the teacher asks them." Yet, this does not mean that those in the inquiry school endorsed frequent testing. They saw frequent testing as unfair for reasons like, "That's too many tests! They never have any time to learn anything. They can't study, they already have to know it all."

The views of children in the inquiry school, like those in the direct instruction school, are consistent with their school experiences. Children attending the inquiry school were not bound to a correct-answer-focussed curriculum. They were free to explore controversial issues and, with guidance from their teachers, to construct their own learning agendas. These children were not expected to come to school knowing the correct answers to worksheets and tests: they rarely did them. They learned factual information and specific skills while taking on bigger, more challenging tasks and making new discoveries. Mistakes were seen as a normal, albeit frustrating, part of learning.

What Do We Teach With Tests?

The idea that school structure has some impact on students' critiques of schooling is not new. McNeil (1988) notes that high school teachers often control students by testing lists of facts — information that can be easily graded. Students learn to accept this common ritual and might even think it is fair. Nevertheless, students also give up the idea that school is a place where they learn significant things: Their personal sources of information have more credibility. When students create such a dichotomy between school knowledge and personal knowl-

edge, schooling becomes a rather empty ritual. Credentialing takes precedence over meaningful learning, and schooling becomes of no value when students seek to understand their worlds.

Fortunately, young children are not as cynical as are high school students about the value of schooling. They still get excited about the prospect of learning new things. Yet, even these children can express logical, sometimes scathing, critiques of their experiences. The students in Sue Hazzard's second grade, for example, scorned workbooks and tasks that require them to assert correct answers. Peter, one of Sue's students, tells us, "We should really do it in life. We get tired of answering lots of questions. Scientists aren't inside doing worksheets. They are in the world finding things" (Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993, p. 94).

When we ask children about fairness, they are eager to tell us about such inconsistencies in what we ask of them. It seems, however, that we adults must first learn more about the importance of taking time to converse with children.

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TEACHER VOICES

Primary Educators in Dialogue

Guest Editor Clare Kosnik talks with five educators who are on the Program Committee of the Canadian Association for Young Children.



Clare I'd like to deal with some issues regarding primary education. How do you define the basics? Who'd like to start with that so that we can set our framework?

Isabel I think the children need to feel they belong to the community of learners first of all, which is what school is all about. They need to feel a sense of belonging to the community and the classroom, to the social context of the classroom, and I think they need to feel a sense of belonging within themselves.

Mary Traditionally, in primary we have divided the program into the social and emotional, the physical and the intellectual, and I think it's very difficult to divide them because there's an overlap in all areas. But you mentioned belonging and that takes in the whole area of self-esteem and attitudes to learning and if the child isn't a fearless learner, the

child is going to have problems in the world they're going to have to take over.



Sandy I was thinking of communications as one of the basics in terms of having the child listen, having the child speak. Communication skills are doubly important now with

the large number of ESL students that we have coming into primary programs. They need copious quantities of listening skills in order to pick up the language and they need this before they can begin anything like what the old basics were. They have to learn the language, to be able to speak it, to be able to think it, to be able to communicate their basic needs.

Valerie I think what I've just heard around the table right now is the core of what early childhood is all about and that is self-esteem. As early childhood educators, that is the most important thing that we can foster in each child — "I am worthy, I am capable, I am valuable, I am able to do all these things if you give me a chance to be able to do them." That's where we come in as adults, to give children this chance to reach their full potential.

Carol I think that teachers and parents alike need to believe in the fact that children are learners. We've lost that sense of what children are. One of the definitions that I really like, especially for young children, is Alice Yardley's *Back to the Basics* where she says that educators get all caught up in what education is to them. If we really want to know what education is for young children, we need to watch children and work with

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them every day in classrooms. We need to watch them and let them be the learners, we need to give them risk-free environments and let them communicate with one another and with other adults and with the people in the community. We need to help children become independent in what they do, and also give them that sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Mary I'd really like to support what Carol is saying. I think you're making a pitch for having trust in the fact that children will learn if we set the environment. As educators, sometimes we're fearful that if we don't orchestrate learning, it's not going to happen. That's very arrogant of us because what we're saying is that teaching equates learning, and it doesn't necessarily. You can't dictate learning.

Isabel I'd like to see an emphasis on the process in early childhood education — the way the program and the environment are structured to invite children to learn. But we have a lot of parents who think that basics have to do with products. More so now than ever before there really does seem to be an emphasis on "what you are teaching them," as opposed to "what they are learning while they're playing."

Clare How can we communicate this, not only to parents but also to the public at large?



Carol There are a number of ways we could be doing it. First of all, our teacher and early childhood training should be more comprehensive in terms of making sure that everyone has a good sound knowledge of child development. Another thing we need to do is to have parents participate in programs a lot more than we do. We need to introduce parents to the stages of development in play and to what their children are doing at various stages.

Mary I think we need to have a very strong parent education message about what we are trying to do. I also think the Ministry should come out with a ratio-

nale to support what early childhood education is doing. Right now there is no informed voice within education explaining to parents what we are doing, and parents are bewildered and confused.

Carol Another message that we have to insist on and convey is that we want top quality people in early childhood education. There's research to support that the higher the qualification of the early childhood educators, the better the product.

Clare What about the primary curriculum?



Isabel If you re-vamp your definition of curriculum and go with Mary's earlier suggestion of an emergent curriculum, you would build the curriculum on where the child is now and on what the teacher observes and knows about the child's needs and interests. There's another definition, and that's the transformational curriculum where the curriculum is transformed as the child and the adult interact. Children are learning all the time, so the transformational curriculum is the ideal. The question is how do we get this concept across to the parents, to the adults, who don't actually realize that all this learning is taking place.



Mary Looking at emergent literacy, for example, I believe that if parents realized how the activities their children are engaged in during the day relate to the curriculum of literacy, they would regain some of the confidence that the press has crushed out of them. I think it is productive to come from an "enlightening" position. If we just shared our curriculum for literacy and numeracy with parents, we could show them a definite progression. Teachers are very aware that they are fostering the growth of an individual child through the next stage. I think we confuse teaching with instruction, and good teachers often teach without the typical impres-

sion we have of instruction, which is the power model where there's an adult standing up throwing information at the child.



Valerie The training of the educators becomes really important and training needs to include the ability to articulate what you are all about, what it is that you're doing, and

why it is that you're doing what you're doing. But teachers definitely have difficulty around that and they feel stressed out because they feel that we're asking them to do more and more.

Isabel We keep needing to go back to children, don't we? I know teachers are saying children have changed. As a teacher, looking at either children or the curriculum or the basics, you can say, "There's so much more, oh, things have changed, oh, I have such diversity in my classroom, I'm stressed out." But you can look for the common threads in there. To me, that's a basic that we need to get back to — what's common for all children — the learning through their play that happens there.

Mary My sense of it is that children and childhood hasn't changed but everything else has changed. Childhood is far more stressful than it ever was. Apparently, today's children are going to experience the equivalent of ten industrial revolutions in their lifetimes. You look at the children who lived through the industrial revolution and how that impacted on their lives, well, the children who we're teaching now will have ten times that impact. I think in a sense we have to stand up and protect childhood. Teachers are trying to keep stress off children all the time, and the one thing about primary education that has insulated children against stress is that it is the only bastion of holistic education. We don't carve the children up and say, "Okay, for 10 minutes you're a math learner, for 20 minutes you're a phys ed learner." Their learning is truly integrated and it's an admirable model. One concern that we have in our board goes right back to our JK children and that is the number of adults that process them in a day. In one school, we

counted eight people that a class of three- and four-year-olds had to deal with in one day. What kind of continuity are we giving, what are the messages?

Isabel One snowy day this past winter while watching a four-year-old taking off his snow boots, it suddenly struck me that that child could do that twelve times that day, as he went from the child care to kindergarten to wherever, and so on. So I suppose we have to ask ourselves, is it important that young children in the primary division do experience a lot of change, does that make them more toler-

ant for change? Is adaptation to change a new basic or are we saying that they need some consistency and solidity in their early years to make them be capable of coping with change later.

Valerie The needs of young children today are no different than they were when we were children. Children respond best when it's the same person who is giving care, or instruction to them, or however you want to define the role. I think parents feel very stressed because the message is that if you don't expose your children to all of these wonderful things, if you don't

have Suzuki and swimming, they're a disaster. They'll never be able to compete with the shrinking jobs and resources in the world. Parents really need support around the idea of early is not better, childhood is not a race and that the more solid the early childhood years are, the better that child will be able to cope. Parents are under tremendous pressure. This whole David Elkind idea of the hurried child is alive and well, and I think teachers have a role and child care professionals have a role in supporting parents.

Clare Thank you all for participating.

Towards a Focus on the Child

A Historical Review of Curriculum Approaches

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Several years ago, when I taught a course at a teachers' college, I remember a student expressing indignation that a Grade 3 class she had observed was exactly the same as she remembered it when she was a child. The student wondered why things had not changed. At the completion of her year, I asked how she intended to teach Grade 3. "The best thing to do is to leave things alone. After all, I turned out all right," she replied. I was disappointed; her experiences had convinced her to accept the status quo.

My years of educational experience have made me part of the historical past. It is from this vantage point that I know the process of change is unpredictable, evolutionary rather than revolutionary,

some aspects changing, some remaining the same.

In the 1940s I started my sojourn in the school system, as a student. Grades 1, 2, and 3 were in one room. The Grade 1 children sat at tables, and were occupied mainly in cutting pictures out of a thick catalogue. I had a book called *Mary, John and Peter*. I have no memory of other books, neither do I remember what I learned during those three years in that room.

I now know that the Ministry guidelines published in 1941 called for specific programs in health and physical education, English, natural science, social studies, arithmetic, music, and art. The grade system was believed to enable each child to reach his or her goal in a better way if it was recognized that "there is no set time or grade level at which every child can be expected to develop the ability to master an arithmetical process or to reach a given stan-

dard of reading achievement. The wisdom of retarding a child for a year because of failure in these respects is open to grave question" (*The Programme of Studies for Grades I to VI*, 1941, p. 9).

The teacher was empowered with the freedom to act independently so long as this was accompanied at all times "by the consideration for the rights, the comfort, and the convenience of other people" (pp. 18, 19). Furthermore, "this freedom of choice on the part of the individual teacher will make uniform standards of attainment in any given grade impossible. The only uniformity at which the elementary school should aim is that every child at the end of their course should have acquired the power to attack new work and feel a zest in doing so" (p. 11).

A term called "enterprise" — defined as "group activity undertaken by the children for a purpose that appeals to them as being worthwhile" — was introduced as a natural way of learning. Children's energies and capacities were thought to be released in activities they consider worthwhile. "So long as children are trained to depend on adult direction in their work they will not develop the power of grappling with difficulties and overcoming obstacles" (p. 18). Nevertheless, the course of study strongly suggested that the teacher determined what was to be done.

The dichotomy between theory and practice was evident. With increases in

the content and number of subjects, accompanied by a weekly allocation of time, the textbook, blackboard, hectograph, and commercial workbook dominated the program in most classes.

In the late fifties when I began my teaching career, the program was the first consideration, and textbooks were the course of study. If texts were not written in ten chapters, the teacher divided the number of pages by ten, thus determining his or her long-range plans. The Department of Education inspector visited each class once a year, examining the pupils' work to see if the teacher was on target.

Soon after I became a principal, the "learning centre approach" was introduced to the system. For some teachers, this meant that the child did the traditional seatwork in another location, at tables, on the floor, and always in groups. The teacher's approach at first was didactic with limited choices since the activities remained mainly paper-and-pencil tasks. Over time I realized this period of change was essential for teachers to adjust to informal group activity.

In 1968, *Living and Learning* affirmed the changes taking place in some schools.

"A better understanding and application of learning theory has meant changes in classroom methods, and the emphasis has shifted from teaching to learning.... A great number of teachers are now formulating and expressing their personal philosophy of education. More attention is being given to helping pupils solve problems of concern to them, and less to the memorization of specific facts. The focus is more on how to learn and less on what to know and remember. Education is becoming a process, rather than a thing." (p. 123)

I remember in particular the open plan schools that were built without a true understanding of the concept of open space. The bottom line in most instances was the reduction in cost. Teachers had to plan together to make the best of poor design, as well as share ideas, a sharp contrast from the isolation of both teachers and methods behind closed doors.

As primary co-ordinator at this time, I believed that this need to have continuous opportunities for dialogue in an open, relaxed environment would be accommodated best at a teacher centre where teachers could meet in small groups and discuss children, play, materials, observation, record keeping, suit-

able reading materials beyond the basal readers, and personal inquiry. The Board provided such a teacher centre from 1973 to 1985. Given time to observe and reflect, the teacher understood the why and the how of change. The change has been dynamic.

In 1975 the Ministry of Education issued *The Formative Years* and a support document *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions*. This latter document pointed out that the teachers must not only care for the children in their charge, but also show that they care. Self-esteem, self-identity, sensitivity, confidence, opportunity to acquire competence are used throughout the document to stress the importance of the individual child. The child must be given the time necessary to develop and learn without fear of failure.

In the past five years it has become very evident to me that there is among teachers a reflection of greater understanding of the child's needs, a willingness to speak openly for the child. No government document on education has ever been fully implemented. This cannot happen through print alone.

Now *The Common Curriculum* is the new guide to developing curriculum. Although the intent is commendable, the learning outcomes in this document are in danger of swallowing up the primary child.

"The best preparation that the child can have for the demands of later life is the provision of the most meaningful social experience at his own age level." (*Programme of Studies for Grades I to VI*, 1941, p. 9)

Some things defy time!

Preparing Early Childhood Educators

A Vision of the Highest Possibilities

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Erin is four. In the morning she goes to childcare at the neighbourhood school. Erin's childcare teacher (Teacher C) completed a two-year program. He knows a lot about child development but little about emergent literacy. Yet, in Ontario, as in many other places, his qualification is only valid for the childcare system. In the afternoon, Erin goes to Kindergarten in the same school. Erin's Kindergarten teacher (Teacher K) previously taught in the junior division. He knows a lot about literacy skills but little about the development of social competence in early childhood. His qualification, too, is only valid for the school system. While different in

training, expertise, and style, is one of Erin's teachers "better" than the other?

This scenario illuminates some of the crucial issues in the preservice preparation of personnel who work with young children. There is widespread opinion that this preparation needs change and improvement. The core issues are defining early childhood educators and education, the course content for exemplary practice, and outcome credentials

Defining Early Childhood Educators and Education

Both Teacher C and K identify themselves as early childhood educators. They both work with children in the "0 through 8 years" age category which defines early childhood. They both hold "professional" qualifications as evidence of their competence. Erin likes both of her teachers and

is learning in both programs.

What should define early childhood education for initial training purposes? Traditionally early childhood education tended to mean preschool. The current teaching qualification in Ontario has a level and a system designation. Teacher K approves. Teacher K says he is a generalist. Should early childhood education be defined by ages of children as 3 through 7? Teacher C agrees. Teacher C claims he is a specialist.

Can early childhood education really be defined by a philosophy? It is dominated by a "developmental" or "progressive" perspective; yet within this perspective, there are competing belief systems: child-centered versus curriculum-centered orientations. Teacher C values a play-based curriculum. Teacher K supports a learn-to-read skill-oriented approach. Compatibility between these two orientations is currently under discussion. Early childhood educators are working to clarify the essence and implications of "developmentally appropriate practice" (DAP).

DAP is grounded in a constructivist perspective which believes that a child like Erin autonomously constructs her own knowledge of the world. The dominant philosophy of the school system is behaviourism, which views the learner as passive, obedient to rules, and views learning as the accumulation of skills and knowledge. Erin knows that childcare and Kindergarten have different rules and that her teachers want her to do different things in different ways and sometimes she is very confused.

Course Content for Exemplary Practice

Three integrated components commonly make up a teacher education program: general education, professional subjects, and field practice. The foremost area of content should be general education. This may be defined as the subject areas for which young children begin to develop concepts: the liberal studies, humanities, math and science. The purpose of any general education component should be an understanding of the conceptual hierarchy to which young children may be introduced. For example, teachers who studied math may be more likely to give priority to numeracy than those who did not. Teacher C took one or two liberal studies courses. Teacher K completed

a degree in English. It is difficult to conclude which one is more qualified in this area.

In early childhood the most significant professional knowledge is about children, their development, and learning processes. It is not enough to study child development only for the specific age group which the certification covers. To understand where children are, they should know where children have been and where they are going. Teacher C studied child development, strategies for observation, and positive guidance. Teacher K learned about methods for teaching language arts and other subjects in his required professional courses.

Both Teacher C and K did field practice during their training. Field experiences provide the teacher-in-preparation with opportunities to consolidate knowl-

Early childhood teacher preparation programs must educate professionals who hold a vision of the highest possibilities of human development.

edge and skill, to test beliefs and expectations, and evolve practical arguments. Teacher C was assigned to Kindergarten and childcare programs. Teacher K completed his student teaching in both Grade 2 and Grade 6 classes.

The more specialized our knowledge about young children, their learning processes, and facilitative learning environments, the more likelihood there is that both Teacher C and Teacher K could deliver exemplary programs characterized by those adult-child interactions which affect the well-being of children.

A pre-service program should also equip the candidate to put a foot on the rung of the ladder of professionalism. Hitz (1993) underlines the importance of the ability of teachers to utilize appropriate resources, literature, organizations, and experiences: "because those who do not understand or are unable to apply theory and research are vulnerable to

new tricks, bandwagons and recipes because they are not reflective, nor to they have the knowledge foundation to be evaluative" (p.13).

Outcome Credentials

Other professions require at least baccalaureate level preparation before autonomous professional functioning is allowed. Few professions require less. Teacher C has a diploma. Teacher K has two degrees. Is one truly more qualified than the other to educate Erin?

What kind of teacher does Erin need? A teacher who understands and can function in both of the systems which provide programs for Erin: the childcare and the education system. Erin needs a teacher who can observe and interpret her developmental progress, who can design and deliver DAP programs, who can be respected by other professionals, who can collaborate with her parents to facilitate further learning and development.

How can we ensure teachers like this? Start with legislative and regulation changes which recognize some qualification overlap and clearly identify a career lattice for early childhood professionals. Develop different articulation arrangements between and among all the post-secondary training and education institutions. These would endorse the expertise and present mandates of each, yet offer a more integrative program of general and professional studies for early childhood candidates. Give more recognition to prior learning experiences and to personal characteristics of those who are admitted to these programs. Provide more early childhood specialization options for present teachers and administrators. Recognize the financial benefits and the prevention power of quality early childhood care and education.

Early childhood teacher preparation programs must educate professionals who hold a vision of the highest possibilities of human development. This preparation must demonstrate that our concern for children does transcend our cultural and political struggles.

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BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Reflecting on the Relationship

An Interview with Ada Schermann

*Orbit Guest Editor Clare Kosnik conducted this interview
with the late Ada Schermann in the fall of 1993.*

Clare How would you describe the current relationship between home and school?

Ada I see it in a number of ways. There are some schools where parents wouldn't dream of walking into the school and chatting with the principal or the teacher. In such instances the extent of the relationship is non-existent. There are schools where you see parents coming and going in a very easy sort of way, and the extent of the relationship is a daily event. So when you talk about relationship, it varies tremendously. I remember seeing a big notice over the front door of a school which said "Parents are welcome here." But that such a notice had to be put up said something about the fact that they probably weren't welcome in a great many places, which is really very, very sad.

The quality of the relationship is also very different from one school to another. In some, it's a forced relationship in which the principal dictates what the parents may or may not do. I think that in some instances principals frighten the

life out of parents because they say, "Well, we'd like to have you as volunteers." A principal once told me he has an evening for parents hoping to be volunteers where he takes them through how to work the film projector, how to work the slide projector, how to work the tape recorder, and the result is a lot of people are just frightened off. Then when parents come in as volunteers, some teachers only see a pair of hands coming in to wash the paint brushes and cut out stuff and fill bulletin boards. I think that the teacher should keep in mind that what the parent is bringing into the classroom is a "thinking head." They can enrich the classroom and there are many things they can do, even if they come in and cannot speak English. It's perfectly acceptable, even desirable, to have a mother who only speaks Portuguese, for example, come in and read to a small group of children in their native language, because one wants them to begin to understand what reading is about, and it really doesn't matter what language they're reading. We have a richness of talent among our parents and that's what

we want them to use in the classroom.

There are other ways in which the nature of the relationship is different. Some schools like to have their parents actually giving them curriculum input, so they bring a group of parents together at the beginning of Kindergarten, and say, "This is where we propose to go to in the year, but what are some of the things that you would like us to include?" We don't do that often enough. If we did that we would find out that the children already know a great deal about what we were going to teach them because the parents have already taught them. I think that sort of shared curriculum planning could benefit both the teacher and the pupils. A lot of parents are coming forward in fundraising, and that is a legitimate relationship for people to have with the school. One has to allow the relationship to develop in a way that's right for the particular teacher and for the particular group of parents that year.

Clare You have to find what works for your community.

Ada A lot of principals are terrified of having parents in the classroom. They are afraid parents will violate confidentiality rules and so they would rather involve them in a whole lot of other ways. That's fine, because the principal has to be comfortable with what's going on.

Clare What about the different trust levels that are required for the various types of relationships?

Ada In a fundraising relationship, or having parents involved in helping with the lunch programs, you don't have to have a great deal of trust, but you have to have trust when parents are working in the classroom and sitting down with the teachers and talking about what they'd like to see happen in the curriculum. But

trust isn't something that happens overnight. It's something that develops and it can only develop by having people come in and work in an area in which they are comfortable and expand on that. The volunteers don't have to be confined in the class in which the parent's child is.

Clare Sometimes parents don't want to be with their child, because they find it too distracting.

Ada And some children can't cope with their parent in a different relationship. So I think that is an individual thing. I don't think the place for a parent volunteer is necessarily in their child's classroom. Some people are secure with that and some children love it.

Clare Why do you feel that primary is the place to establish the link between home and school?

Ada When a child starts school, it's customary with many boards now for teachers to pay home visits, and I think that's a marvellous idea; teachers really ought to be commended for doing this. It's at that point they begin to see what the home is able to give the child and

... you have to have trust when parents are working in the classroom and sitting down with the teachers and talking about what they'd like to see happen in the curriculum.

what the school might have to compensate for. When children are very little, the chances are that they're not always going to be bringing themselves to school, but some adult who's closely linked with the home is going to be in contact with the school on a regular basis, so it's a very natural relationship and that is the one to capitalize on and build up. Parents have total responsibility

for their children. They have to ensure that things are going very well for their child at school, and they have to do that from day one, so that's really the natural starting point for the relationship. Sometimes teachers have said to me, "Mrs. So-and-so thinks that her child's a genius and I don't see it at school," and I always say to the teacher, "Why don't you ask the parent what the child is doing at home that makes the parent feel the child is especially bright, and then perhaps you'll begin to see some things that need to be incorporated into your program that will allow the child the opportunity of demonstrating this talent."

Clare How do you think the child benefits from that?

Ada The child can benefit particularly in the mental health area, because a child has to feel secure. If children are not secure, they're not going to reach out for experience. If a child is shy, is insecure, then the parent might have ways of helping the child that would be good for the teacher to know about and the teacher might have ways of helping the child that would be good for the parent. They have to be on the same wavelength. If the parent and the teacher are on the same wavelength with regard to what behaviour is appropriate and what is inappropriate, it is much easier for the child.

Clare Yes, and that consistency is part of security.

Ada Absolutely.

Clare Often teachers have to reach out to forge a new relationship with parents. Any practical suggestions that you could offer teachers?

Ada Well, I think that one has to take just a step back to pre-service. You hear very little about working with parents. The students in my particular option at the Faculty of Education have parents' nights, and the students have to plan them and conduct them — if need be, in a variety of languages, because there's no point in bringing people to a meeting that they can't understand; it's better to say less and have it translated and everybody get something. In the same way that practical experience is very much a part of the teacher education program

now, I feel that we have to bring in — it should have been done years ago — parents in order to develop a talent for dealing with this.

I think that there's a lot of discussion about "play is the child's work," but quite frankly, I don't like to use the word play and I don't like to use the word work. No parent is sending me a child to school to play, and civilized parents are not sending their children to school to

No parent is sending a child to school to play, and civilized parents are not sending their children to school to work either. They're sending their children to school to learn ...

work either. They're sending their children to school to learn, and I feel that when teachers talk to parents, they need to talk about learning, and they need to talk to individual parents about how a child's behaviour has changed. What new information the child seems to have. How skills are developing. How his or her point of view is changing. And they actually have to talk learning not just activities.

I also feel that they need to explain activities in terms of learning. For example, if a parent looks into the classroom and sees a child at the water table and the child is pouring water from a bucket into a narrow necked beaker and not a drop is spilled, the teacher should point out that three weeks ago the child couldn't do that; it is evidence that the child's fine motor control is improving. But the teacher has to look at learning and not be beguiled by end products, because very often the end product hides the learning. So you have to be a very keen observer and then it's your observations on how the behaviour is changing that you need to reflect to the parents.

I think that newsletters are a very good idea because young children go

home and parents say, "now what did you do today?" and the child says "nothing," because they cannot recall the many different things that they were involved in. Newsletters could show what songs they might be learning that week, or some of the interesting words they have taken up, activities, completed books that they've had read to them. I think the way children are beginning to write in diaries are very useful. I also think that teachers need to take account of the parents' readiness for this information, because a lot of parents know school from when they went to school, and it looks different and perhaps was in another country. The parents need to be taught to appreciate exactly what is happening, but again in terms of learning.

I also think that children need to learn the appropriate names for what they are doing because a child in Grade 2 goes home and the father says to the child, "what math did you do?" and the child says "we didn't do any." Now what the child actually did that day was to measure the classroom because they wanted to rearrange the furniture. Some used a tape measure, some used a metre stick, some used a rolling trundle wheel, and then they measured the furniture and they began to figure out what was what. Well, if that isn't math, I don't know what is, but the child doesn't know that that's math. The teacher needs to help the child with the diary entry and say, "okay, what are all the things that we did today that involved number work, measurement?" Then there would be a record of what has happened.

I also think that when a parent says to the teacher, "my child brought home this piece of writing and there were very nice, lovely ideas, but the spelling is just unbelievably dreadful." I don't think the teacher should say to the parent, "well, don't worry, it will come out eventually," because in some instances it doesn't. I think the teacher should send the child home with a personal spelling book of the words that they need to learn. And the next time they use them they can get them right or put these into their little personal dictionaries, so that the parent might see that the product isn't exactly what they would like it to look like, but something is being done about it. It doesn't need red pencil all over the card. You don't have to write on it at all. I think that the way some teachers muti-

... parents say, "now what did you do today?" and the child says "nothing," because they cannot recall the many different things that they were involved in.

late the children's work, it's dreadful. So I think that they do have to know that somewhere along the line, something is happening about it.

Clare We've fragmented the curriculum so much, we've got everything so broken up, teachers don't see how the

class newsletter could be an ongoing language arts project every month; the class together does the newsletter. One final question. How can the principal facilitate communication between the home and the school?

Ada The principal is the key person, because if the principal doesn't approve of the close relationship between home and school, then it's very difficult for the teachers to create the right kind of ambiance. The principal has to be part of it. This has to happen from the day a child is greeted at the school. When the parents come to register their children, it's the principal's job, or the vice-principal's job, to take them on a tour of the whole school, because they're not just coming to participate in a JK or an SK, they're coming to participate in the whole elementary project.

Clare Thank you so much, Ada, for sharing your experience with us.

Professor Ada Schermann passed away in the winter of 1994. She came to the Institute of Child Studies, University of Toronto, in 1963 and as Professor, Director, mentor, and friend touched many lives at the Institute.

Gerri Mabin, Principal of the Mabin School (Toronto), shares with Orbit some reminiscences about this exceptional teacher and child educator. Ada was on the Board for the Mabin School, 1991-1993.

I am writing to say my thank you to Ada Schermann. I don't think I am being presumptuous in saying that I speak for the countless others who also have reason to thank her. My only regret is having left it too late: I intended to tell Ada this in person.

For me, Ada Schermann stands alone, above all others who have influenced my life in the past 25 years, when our paths first crossed. It was she who told me to come over from England as there was a vacancy at the Institute of Child Studies (ICS). Eight months later I landed in Toronto.

At that time, Ada was the Coordinator of the Early Childhood Programme at

ICS. However, for me, Ada was the Institute. She was omnipresent. I have this composite picture of her there: Ada, popping in the classroom at odd moments, armed with her camera. Ada the lecturer showing slides and telling funny but always relevant anecdotes to illustrate her points. Ada describing something that you were doing in the classroom, which you felt was so-so, as being a perfect example of some philosophical theory; she made you think. And all of this, she did with the most extraordinary energy and passion.

It is true that I think of her daily. Not just because I run a school whose practice and philosophy are hugely influenced by Ada. And not because I would not be here if it had not been for her. But because once, long ago, Ada gave me a wooden chest of drawers when I was first setting up my apartment. I use that every day. In a way, it symbolizes how much a part of my every day she is and will continue to be.

I, like so many others, learned so much about learning, so much about children, so much about myself — so much from Ada.

The Primary School Years

A Mother's Reflections

Annetta Braine

Parent
Peel Board of Education

When I was invited to write "a parent's perspective of primary education," I welcomed the chance to share a few observations of my children's schooling. I have one child who completed primary education several years ago, another who completed it this past year, and a third in the midst of primary education. Although I would never presume to speak for all parents, I have had numerous opportunities to witness the excitement primary education generates and to discuss with other families the beginning school experience.

Not all those chats at the playground, at Open House, the Christmas Concert, or on school trips were for naught! We discussed topics paramount to our children's educational welfare, and the sheer range of concerns and apparent contradictions in opinions never ceased to amaze me. The following are just a few examples of typical remarks overheard almost daily over a period of ten years. Perhaps you have uttered one of these observations.

Some teachers are too demanding.
Some teachers are not exacting enough.
The standards are too low.
They're rushing these kids too much.
The teacher is just too strict.
There isn't enough discipline in school.
They don't teach spelling anymore.
Where are the desks?
When we went to school ...

Parents cannot help recalling their own childhood experiences. How many of these past successes and failures in the primary classroom, I wonder, affect their dealings with their own children and their primary teachers? Do adults sometimes need a reminder that our children are not just new and improved versions of ourselves? Children are who they are, not always who or what we want them to be.

Amidst all the seemingly opposing

viewpoints, and emotional reactions aside, parents do share one common goal. We want the absolute best of everything for our kids! Is that an unreasonable expectation?

Until our children have begun formal schooling, we have protected them from most dangers and discouraged them from most risk taking. In school, though, our little ones are strongly encouraged to take risks: to dare to try to read, to write, to count, to paint, to sing, to leap in no

Today's parents are
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guilty about whatever
provisions we have made
regarding our children —
from the moment of
conception on.

matter what the consequences. How frightening! How fabulous!

When our kids are in Kindergarten, we puzzle along with them over such phrases as "numbers have meaning." (Of course they do.) We celebrate their victories over their clothing: the tying of laces, mastery of the zipper. We tour the classroom activity centres, vainly wishing that our little tyke spent less time at the climbers and more time at the listening centre.

We exclaim over colourful paintings with unintelligible captions, sometimes translated into precise printing by the teacher. We rejoice in those sheaves of sorting and circling and patterning, only vaguely aware of their significance in the grand scheme of things educational.

Sometimes our little ones bring home those reassuring booklets on a common theme: a colour, shape, number, or animal. By first grade there is even more

recognizable achievement: pages demonstrating further knowledge of letters and numbers — tidier, more presentable papers worthy of any refrigerator door.

Parents of second graders can breathe a sigh of relief. They instantly recognize the math as number facts and all the familiar operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Some things never change.

In third grade, pupils follow impressive units of study regarding the environment and current events. By the end of this phase, they take "jot notes" in anticipation of the dreaded/welcome "project" or worse/better yet — a "speech"! The experts say, "They are coming along nicely."

As the primary years continue, we parents are constantly offered advice, suggestions, and information regarding the latest trends in teaching and learning. Not satisfied with mere in-school success, we encourage our children in extra-curricular activities as well. Which ones are essential? Swimming, skating, gymnastics, soccer, music lessons, dance, karate, hockey? A good parent must do more every day in every way to improve their children.

Today's parents are too often made to feel guilty about whatever provisions we have made regarding our children — from the moment of conception on. This guilt and anxiety along with all the joys of parenthood only intensify when school begins. There is enormous pressure to discover how our kid "measures up" compared to the peer group. This leads to the inevitable question: How do we measure up as parents?

As I write this article, I can smile at some of my worries during my first-born's early school years. I am much more relaxed now. My oldest child is still an enthusiastic student. My second daughter has also weathered her primary years. Just this past week, my son, the baby of the family, has revealed himself to be an "emerging reader." I cannot describe the thrill, the excitement, the relief that this miraculous development has manifested itself yet again in our happy home. We have been very fortunate.

I think of the bumper sticker, "If you can read this, thank a teacher." Have I remembered to thank a primary teacher lately for helping my children to learn the most fundamental life skills?

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between the best of research and the best
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— Burle Summers
Researcher
Ontario Royal Commission on Learning

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Guest Editor George Dei, Professor in the
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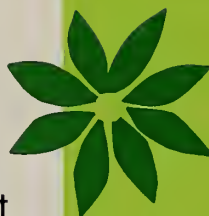
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